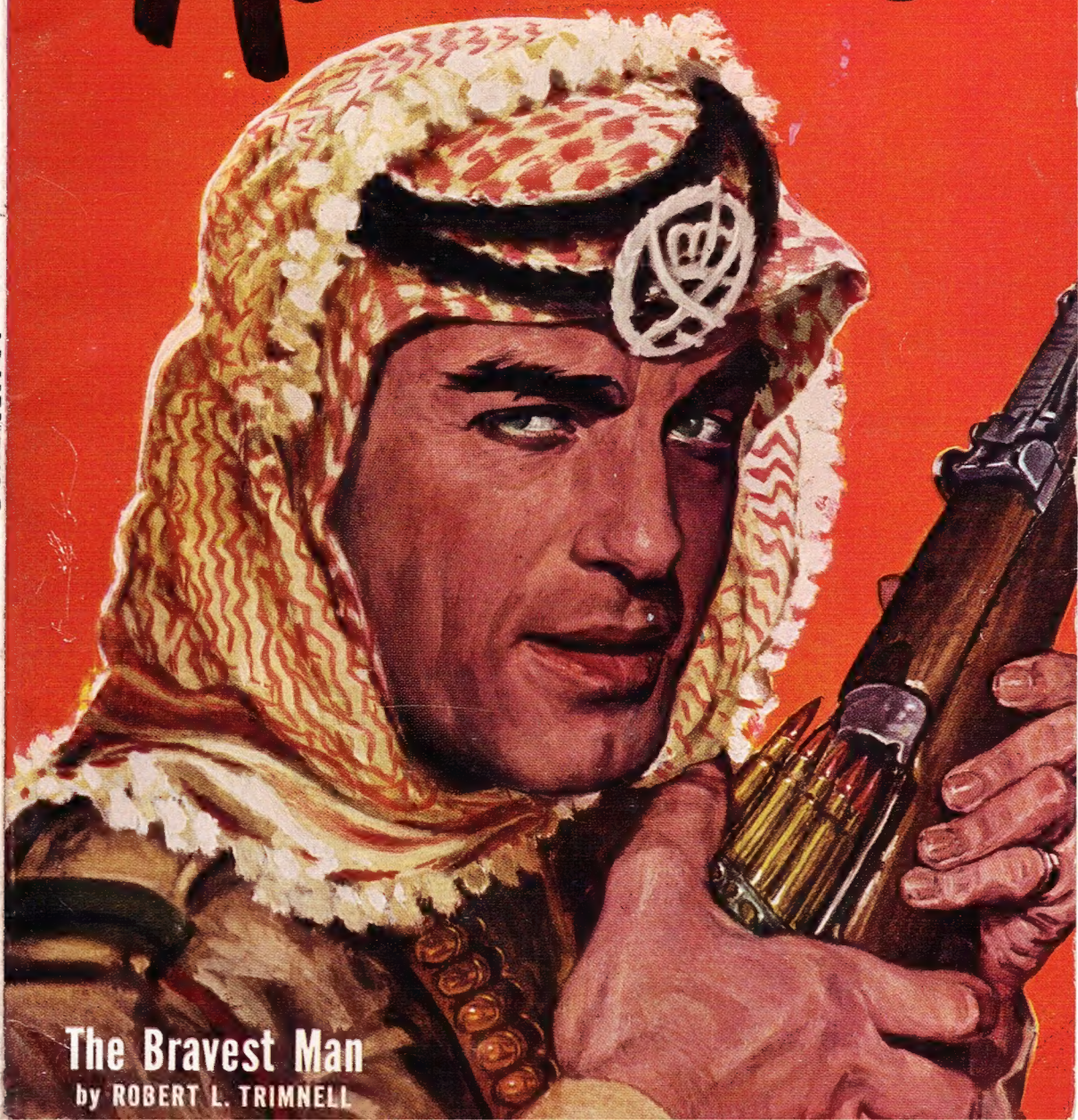


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The Bravest Man
by ROBERT L. TRIMNELL

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Kendall W. Goodwyn, Editor

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The Bravest Man

by

ROBERT L. TRIMNELL

In the Cafe of the Dead Rooster, one might find patriots and collaborationists, Gestapo agents—and the bravest man in France.

WHEN I HALTED the string of jeeps and half-tracks in front of that German farmhouse, we didn't know what would come out from under the white sheet they'd rigged as a surrender flag. We were too tired and muddy and unshaven to care much. Our recon outfit had been chasing like crazy after the disintegrating Nazi army. We sat there and mouthed our cigarettes.

A face stuck out of the doorway; there was a yell. "Les Americains!"

A dozen men swarmed out. They piled all over the jeeps and kissed us on both cheeks. They were as dirty and as bearded as we were. We grinned and took it because they were Frenchmen and we could imagine what it felt like to end four years of slave labor.

They weren't as starved as most of the prisoners we'd seen. You can't keep a man too skinny when he's working on a farm. But they'd gone short on soap, razors, and clothes. In

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general, they looked about as handsome as we did.

I scratched my beard and tried to think of some phrases in G.I. French. I was too tuckered out.

"Anybody speak English?" I asked.

"Rather," said a voice.

A long fellow with straggly red mustaches ambled out of the group and draped against the fender of my jeep. The way he said "rather" was about as French as Winston Churchill.

"You sound British," I said.

He tugged his mustaches thoughtfully. "Yes, I do, don't I? I'd almost forgotten. For two years I've been trying to convince every bloke I've met that I'm French. I bloody well almost believe it myself." He grinned at me. "Sergeant, if you'd break out some cigarettes, I'll tell you something good."

We did that all around. We sat there and relaxed while those smoke-starved Frenchmen inhaled the first since they became Nazi prisoners. Between lighting his cigarette and sucking hungrily on it, the red-mustached Englishman told me his name was Thompson and he was bloody well glad to see us.

"What about this 'something good'?" I asked him.

He let the smoke run out of his mouth, over the red mustache and up his nose. "Well, we know where there's a hundred cases of brandy. The best. The bloody Jerries stole it from the best cellar in France."

My men grinned at him. I tried to look stern because I was in command.

"Our orders are to reconnoiter and phone the info back to the tank boys," I said.

He sucked deep on the cigarette and grinned. "Fine. We'll give you all the information you can use. Meanwhile, we can get the brandy. Have you any extra guns for my friends here?"

"Why?"

He grinned. "There's fifty bloody Jerries sitting on top of the brandy."

The outcome of the whole thing was that we captured a village with one of those unpronounceable Bavarian names. It was a brisk fight but the Krauts didn't have a chance. Not only did I have the twenty toughest soldiers in the American army, but also a dozen Frenchmen who hadn't had a smoke, a drink, or a crack at the Krauts in four years. They went into it with cigarettes hanging out of their mouths, throwing grenades like they were baseballs. And there was Thompson, the red-mustached Englishman, handling a Browning automatic like it was a carbine. We didn't surround the Krauts because they outnumbered us. We just chased them out of that village until they got away. They had more reason to run than we did. By the time we got back the townspeople were waving American flags and making Tricolors out of petticoats, and the mayor gave us the key to the brandy cellar.

That night we had to wait for orders. Thompson and I used two empty brandy boxes for chairs and

lined up the forty-eight bottles between us. It seemed like the whole division had swarmed into that unpronounceable village. We swore to protect our precious brandy to the last breath.

"I expect to be completely unconscious in a couple of hours," Thompson said. "Devastated. First drink since Jerry picked me up." He tilted a brandy bottle and gurgled down a lot of the finest stuff ever to ease a man's parched throat. I did the same.

"Your Frenchmen fought well," I said, just to make conversation.

He uncorked the brandy bottle from his mouth and licked the red mustaches. "Frenchmen are a bit odd that way," he said. "We Americans and British, when someone strikes us, we strike back immediately. The French are different. They will philosophize first. In my opinion, that is why France fell. But when they have philosophized it out and decided that the blow must be struck—" He let his voice trail off. He corked onto the brandy bottle again.

"I shall tell you about the bravest Frenchman of the war," he said, liberating himself from the brandy bottle for a moment. He rubbed a palm over the mouth of the bottle and stared at the black cellar walls. "Yes, the bravest man I have ever heard of."

"I've seen some too," I said, a bit defensively.

Thompson smiled. He wrapped his long legs around the box he was sitting on, and hooked his toes behind.

"I parachuted into occupied France, you know. Specially trained in demolition and terrorist methods and all that. For six months I played the very hob with Jerry. Finally they needed farm hands in Bavaria quite badly and so I was picked up. You see, I studied in Paris before the war, and lived so much of my life in France that I pass quite easily as a Frenchman."

He said it so calmly that it made me shudder. I was scared enough of war, as a soldier with lots of good soldiers and good guns around me. Everybody is. But that underground stuff—it smacked of Gestapo torture chambers.

We drank some more brandy. As he spoke, his entry into France began to take form in my mind. A moonless night, a parachute blossoming like a puff of smoke in the sky. A tall man dangling at the end of parachute lines. Knowing that the blue jeans and corduroy jacket he wore were very French-looking, and that if he were captured the Germans would never consider him a prisoner of war, nor an innocent French civilian. French civilians were not using parachutes that year.

He landed in one of those tiny French fields of ballroom size, walled by hedgerows. He was trained for this too, and he let himself roll over cold mushy ground until the chute tagged the hedgerow and stopped him with a jerk. He lay quiet and discovered that he was in a field of tomatoes. After he got out of the harness he tried to eat one of the

tomatoes. It had the crunchy outside and inner slush of frosted fruit. He sighed. Rations were lean in Britain. He had hoped to arrive in the lush market gardens of France before frost. It had beaten him to the tomatoes.

He was hiding the chute in the hedgerow when a laugh came from the far bushes. The open laugh of a man who knows the wine is good because he has just tasted it. Thompson dove into the hedgerow.

"Do you know the road to Paris, *mon vieux*?" the voice chortled.

Thompson let his breath wheeze out and he grinned. "*Oui, mon vieux*. The road to Paris is paved with dead Boches."

The other laughed again. There was a rustling in the bushes. "I have decided to change the password, *mon vieux*. The road to Paris is lined with dead Boches and empty bottles." He burst out of the bushes, a slender man, walking with a swinging gait. He held a bottle in his hand. As he came closer Thompson could see the distinguishing mark of every French workman; an unlit cigarette butt jutting from the corner of his mouth. It bobbed as he talked. White teeth flashed and Thompson saw the man's fine hooked nose and black eyebrows, eyes sparkling with the devil and wine.

"Welcome to France, *mon vieux*." The man pushed the bottle into Thompson's hand. The Englishman grabbed it and gulped the first good wine since before the war.

"You know," Thompson said, "I

am a loyal Briton, but our grapes are so bad and so few."

The Frenchman laughed. "The grapes are bad but the dynamite is good." He sobered for a moment. "Is there news?"

"The best. A new kind of dynamite. The cargo you were told to expect tonight will be made up of it." Tentatively, Thompson reached for the bottle again. It was jammed into his hands.

"I am Jacques Dubois," the Frenchman said. "Leader of the terrorists."

Thompson translated the man's name into English. "Jack-of-the-Woods," he mused.

Dubois laughed, his cigarette jerking. "Come now *mon vieux*. We will go. The bottle is empty, and besides, one must have hunger after such a descent from the skies. Leave the parachute. Little friends of mine will dispose of it. The dressmakers are fond of such fine silk. Watch carefully and you will see your parachute walking down the street one day! Come on."

They tramped through the muddy fields for a half hour, until they arrived at the outskirts of the town on the railroad tracks.

"You have satisfactory papers?" Dubois asked.

"I am a farm worker, rejected by the army. My class was '18, and when the class was called, Madame la Republique decided there was too little voltage under my red hair for me to be of use to the army. It is nicely put on the papers. The British Intelligence has a flair for such things, you know."

Dubois laughed at that. "Well, then we must not be seen together. Go down this street to the Cafe of the Dead Rooster. Later you will see me there. Eat and drink well, and know as much about me as people tell you. A farmer of broad views, M. Lamarque, will take you in his employ. He is an old one with mustaches like Clemenceau. He is not one of us, for he is old and not strong. But he does his part. He would not notice that a dim-witted farm hand was not always in his room at night. He would understand the poor boy's having a sweetheart." As he spoke, the cigarette stump bobbed in his mouth, a tiny speck of moving white in the darkness.

Thompson and I sat there on the empty brandy cases and opened another bottle. We did it with a corkscrew, for the brandy was too fine just to knock the neck off and chance losing a lot of it.

"This talk of dresses made from parachutes," I said. "It sounds as though the resistance was quite openly conducted."

"Open! The openness of it made my flesh crawl. And remember, in one town near the rail center, the Jerries had picked up every fifth man on the street, lined them up before the Hotel de Ville and machine-gunned them down. You can see why, when I say the bravest man in France—"

One of my men came in then, with an enormous wedge of white cheese.

I remembered that I was still sergeant in command of a twenty-man reconnaissance team.

"We got orders over the radio," he told me. "Tomorrow we got to scout between the lake and railway south."

Thompson handed him a couple of brandy bottles. He went away, lugging the two bottles. "We've been slogging for two weeks," I told Thompson. "Tonight we'll just get good and drunk. I'd like a bath but I'm too dirty to care much." I broke the cheese in half and we each gnawed on a chunk.

"More loot from France," he said, indicating the cheese. "Normandy, I think." His eyes began wandering again. "Their food is good, and their wine. Their women—" He sighed. That took him back to the story.

I began feeling again what he felt in the Cafe of the Dead Rooster in that little railroad town. The dingy cafe, the glass of rich red wine in his hand, the girl at the corner table, hair black as midnight and lips that caressed him even at that distance.

Farmer Lamarque was sympathetic. He bought Thompson a glass of wine. That indicated that the acquiring of a new farmhand was an event, in those days of scarce labor.

"The Boches," Lamarque said with a hiss on the word. "They, well, they had no need for you?"

Thompson let his lower lip hang a bit as he spoke. "They—did not seem to. They said I would be happier—" He let his voice trail off and stared at the black-haired girl, still

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with his mouth hanging open. He tried not to overdo the act of stupidity, but the excuse to stare at the girl was very nice. The girl saw him staring and her eyes flashed.

"He is an innocent," Lamarque whispered to the girl. "Be kind." The old farmer smoothed his mustaches and jerked a thumb at Thompson.

She looked away. "She is pretty," Thompson said. He let his eyes roam vaguely around the cafe. He saw a fat, red-faced man sitting against a wall, wearing the peaked cap of a railroad engineer. He had watery blue eyes that wandered over the half-dozen people in the Dead Rooster, always returning to his glass of Pastis. He sipped the milky stuff slowly, his eyes peering dully over the rim of the glass. Thompson thought, those could be the eyes of the Gestapo.

"How much money will I earn?" he asked the farmer.

Lamarque knitted his brows and passed a horny hand over his mustaches. Thompson smiled. The war did not rob the peasant of his acumen. He decided to argue the point only a little, as befitted a man peasant-born but without the intelligence to be peasant-shrewd.

The door to the cafe opened. A man strode in, slammed the door behind him. It was Dubois. The cigarette butt still jerked in the corner of his mouth.

"Glisette, *ma petite!*" he called to the girl. He caught Lamarque's shoulder as he strode past. "Ah, Lamarque! I see you are talking to an agent of the filthy Boche. They

scrape deep in the barrel these days."

There was laughter. Thompson smiled as though embarrassed. A shiver ran up his spine. This Jack of the Woods minced no words about his feelings for the conquerors. Thompson glanced at the fat railroad engineer and wondered. The man's pale blue eyes followed the hook-nosed terrorist. Dubois strode over to where the girl sat. He spraddled a chair, grabbed her, and kissed the wine-red lips. A slap sounded through the room as her hand hit his face. He laughed.

"Wine for all!" Dubois shouted to the bartender. "I still have money I stole from a Boche officer the other night."

The railroad engineer spoke. His voice was heavy, dull as his eyes. "Do not talk so loudly, monsieur." His flat lips seemed to batter each word as it came out.

Jack of the Woods turned to him, his mouth twisting in a snarl. "You love the swine! You should, you are nothing but a Red Pig yourself. Porc Rouge! But the Boche officer will not hear who spends his money, Porc Rouge. I cut deep into his bull neck. You remember in the old days when we killed the pigs each winter? Everybody wanted Jacques Dubois to stick their pigs. Nobody bled them so well as I. Remember that, Monsieur Porc Rouge!" He jerked around and put his back to the engineer. He grabbed the girl. She squirmed away from him.

"She does not like that man," Thompson said slowly to the farmer.

Lamarque smiled. "He is her lover, *mon bon petit gar*". Women are that way." He looked up at the taller Thompson and smiled sadly, as though to say, "The poor innocent, he will never learn the things other men know."

To Thompson, it was a strange introduction to the underground. Openly, in a cafe, a man could damn the Nazis. Yet, it was evident that all present were not of the terrorist gang. To his precise British mind it made no sense. Even though he knew France well, he was not prepared for this.

He felt more at ease the next night. He left the garret in Lamarque's farmhouse when a whistle sounded outside. Dubois and two others sat in a clump of bushes, smoking. Between them lay a pile of foot-square packages.

"How goes the milking of cows?" Dubois said.

Thompson laughed. "Lamarque has learned how stupid a man can be at two hundred francs a month."

They grinned. Dubois handed him one of the packages. "Our latest importation from England. Arrived last night after you did, by parachute. The women are already making dresses. But they are using poor material in these cargo chutes. Nothing so fine as you rode in on. Now. The packages."

Thompson opened one. "This is the most wonderful stuff," he said. The package was filled with what

looked like putty. Thompson tore off a lump and worked it with his hands. "Simple enough. Do anything with it you could do with bread dough. Just put a cap and fuze in and it will blow. Good for cutting down trees, if you work it out into a string and tie it around the trunk."

Dubois's eyes glittered. "We have a fine forest around the railroad to Rouen. A tree dropped across the tracks—" He laughed. "The Boches can have their fancy bombs. We have little chunks of dough!"

Thompson spent an hour explaining all the things that could be done with the new explosive. It was capable of such elastic use that soon the terrorists had originated several ideas of their own. It could be squeezed into a lock, a fuze inserted into the keyhole, and poof! No more lock, and little noise. It would explode under water. For rails, there was no need of excavation. Just squeeze a chunk between the rails in the space allowing for expansion.

The next night Thompson accompanied Farmer Lamarque to the Dead Rooster. The place was the same as the first night he came there. The fat railroader that Dubois had nicknamed the Porc Rouge sat against the wall drinking Pastis; his watery blue eyes roamed over the dozen-odd people in the cafe. Again Thompson thought of the Gestapo.

At eight o'clock Jack of the Woods swaggered in. As before, he kissed Glisette and ordered wine for the house, since the dead German officer was still paying for it. Shortly after-

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ward a railroader came in, stood at the bar. A thin man with a long nose. He drank the wine Dubois had provided.

"Jack," he said. "Come here, *mon vieux*. I want to thank you for the drink."

Dubois ran his hand over Glissette's rounded leg. She slapped him. Everyone laughed. Dubois left her and came up beside the railroader.

"You can buy me a brandy by way of thanks," the terrorist said. For a few minutes they stood and exchanged friendly insults. Thompson fixed his gaze on the girl, let his mouth hang open. Out of the corner of his eye he watched Dubois. Whispers were passed between the two. The railroader left. Then Dubois pounded toward Thompson.

"Don't stare at my girl!" he growled. He yanked Thompson by the arm, shouted curses at him.

"An innocent!" Lamarque said. "Be kind to him, please!"

Dubois ignored him, grabbed Thompson's shoulders and shook him. "My girl, fool!" he growled. Then he whispered, "Meet me at the tracks behind the old slaughterhouse." He shoved Thompson back into his seat. "You stare at her like the Porc Rouge does!" Dubois snarled. He turned toward the fat railroad engineer.

In his heavy voice, the Porc Rouge spoke. "You terrorists endanger the lives of honest workmen. You must brag so. One night the Germans will inspect the Dead Rooster and they will find you here. The Gestapo will

get us all then, because they will think we are as you."

Dubois pointed his hawk nose at the man, and his dark eyes glittered. "A fine Frenchman you are, Monsieur Red Pig. You run your train for the filthy Boche with the same pride as if you carried the soldiers of Madame la Republique."

The engineer shrugged. "I have a family. I could not take to the woods even if I wanted. My first duty is to my family."

Dubois sneered. "Your first duty is to your fat belly. Second to that old imbecile Petain and that *maquerneau* Laval." He stared into the man's round blue eyes for a moment. "Your bristly throat would take a sticking-knife well, Red Pig."

The door opened. A hoarse whisper rattled through the cafe.

"A patrol!"

There was a moment's confusion, the sharp intaking of breaths. Only Jack of the Woods was unperturbed. He continued to sneer at the engineer. He walked slowly toward the back door of the cafe.

"My friends would not like it, Red Pig, if you told the Boches that I am going out the back door." Eyes on the engineer, he strode past Glissette, patted her fondly as he passed, and disappeared into the living quarters of the owner of the cafe.

Thompson concentrated on acting like a half-wit. The tramp of feet, the clatter of heavy boots stopped in front of the door. He heard the command to port arms, saw the door fling open and a mask of a Prussian face

march through. He felt his heart flip. "Identification papers," barked the German.

Thompson looked bewilderedly at Lamarque. The old farmer sighed. "The papers, my little one." He took them from Thompson's pocket and showed them to the German. "A good worker," he told the soldier. "Just not very bright."

The German's growl indicated that he considered no Frenchman very bright. He glanced at the papers, threw them down on the table, and strode on.

When he asked for the Porc Rouge's papers, Thompson gulped. But the fat railroader said nothing.

Very likely, Thompson thought, he is afraid of a sticking knife in his neck.

It was an hour later when Thompson sauntered into the shadows behind the slaughter-house. Jack of the Woods appeared like a ghost, with two men like shadows trailing behind. The two men carried rifles. Jacques had a package of explosives under each arm. Without a word, they started walking along the tracks toward the forest two miles out of town.

"The railroad engineer that spoke to me, you saw him.?"

Thompson nodded. "Watching Glisette makes it hard to see other things, but I caught the movement of his lips."

Jacques grinned. "He told me that a train loaded with rifle ammunition

will depart for Rouen at midnight. He will be the engineer. He said there will be Boche soldiers on the train but it will stop if an obstacle is put in the way. He asked me only to keep stray bullets from the locomotive."

Thompson took one of the heavy packages of putty-like explosive from the Frenchman. Silently the four plodded along the tracks. It was close to midnight when they entered the forest, and a thin rain began to soak their clothes. After five minutes in the words, Jacques whistled a tune. Thompson remembered the words of the song from his student days in Paris.

*"Let's taste and see, yes yes yes,
Let's taste and see, yes yes yes,
Let's taste and see if the wine is good."*

From the forest came an answering whistle, and a bass voice took the next verse.

*"I will drink five or six bottles
With a woman on my lap—"*

Jacques laughed raucously. "We'll sing while we work tonight, my cabbages! Jean, you old toad. Go bring us some benzine. We are going to anoint an ammunition train. And drink hearty, lads, we need empty wine bottles to hold the benzine!"

Again they laughed. Thompson shook his head. He tried to picture Britishers fighting with a bottle of wine in one hand and a gun in the other. That was ridiculous.

They selected a bend in the tracks,

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shadowed by some enormous chestnut trees. Thompson had them roll the putty out into rope-like pieces and he tied them around the trees, diagonally, with the low side toward the tracks. That way, he explained, you could spill the tree in the place you wanted it. Then, through the night, came the thin shriek of a whistle. Hurriedly they stuffed fuzes and caps into the explosive.

"Five minutes away," Dubois said. His voice was dead calm.

"Four inches of fuze then," Thompson told them. "Light it now."

A half-dozen trees were encircled by the explosives. The fuzes sputtered in the dark, uncertain specks of light cutting through the rain. The terrorists withdrew a few feet. The locomotive shrieked, its voice muffled now by the forest. Jacques Dubois lit a cigarette, puffed unconcernedly. A revolver was stuck in his belt. He clutched the necks of two wine bottles in each hand.

The first explosion was sharp, and a flash burst out from the trunk of a giant chestnut. The tree hung for a moment as though suspended by wires. Slowly it slid to the ground, its massive branches easing it down over the tracks, obliterating them from view. There was the grinding of iron wheels, an explosion, a crash of wood on metal. Then the spine-scratching scream of air brakes. The headlamp of the locomotive made the fallen trees loom like a mountain, only thin streaks of light breaking through. Another tree exploded, slammed down directly in front of

the train and a dead limb mashed into the head lamp. The light vanished and it was a pitch dark world of running men.

Thompson found himself running after Jack of the Woods. He clutched two of the bottles from the Frenchman. At the first freight car, Dubois yanked the door open with a jerk. It was half-loaded. A man loomed in the doorway, a giant of a man in a dull gray German helmet. He had a gun in his hands but he was too late. Dubois's revolver blasted the night wide open. The man sprawled back. There was a crash as a bottle of benzine smashed on the boxes inside. Dubois leaned close and fired his revolver into the spreading fluid. With a flash the boxcar became a roaring furnace. Thompson raced to the next car. He saw fire burst out five cars down, and the night was thrown into bad focus by the oily orange flames.

A terrorist near him cocked his arm to heave a bottle of benzine on top of the freight car. The rattling clatter of a machine gun croaked out through the night. The terrorist stood there like a statue as the bottle burst into orange flame. Thompson groaned and thought of the Statue of Liberty, hand raised with the torch on high; the man's arm became a flaming brand but he did not know it. He folded to the ground as the chatter of the machine gun tore his life out.

From behind Thompson came a yell. It was Dubois. He stood in the open, outlined by the flames. He leveled the revolver and fired three times. The chattering machine gun

coughed once more and then died.

It seemed that the machine gun started again, but it was not regular enough. Thompson realized it was the ammunition in the first car going off like strings of firecrackers. Dubois was laughing and shouting. Thompson broke one bottle of benzine over the side of the boxcar. A shower of sparks burst from the first car and the second flashed into flame.

"Run!" Dubois was yelling. "There might be big stuff in that boxcar!" He himself raced to the third, broke a bottle over it, fired his gun against it and raced on as flames licked in to the ammunition.

It was a nightmare after that. Thompson remembered himself breaking bottles and seeing a German soldier fall off a boxcar like a lead-filled sack. He remembered flaming boxes blown out of the boxcars and exploding into little bits. One car they had half-emptied before they burned it. When they ran off into the woods, each man was carrying a box of cartridges under his arm, running low as though to duck the thousands of little explosions.

The next day was a hard one because he returned to the Lamarque farm only in time for an hour's sleep and then the milking began. All that day people passing by the farm dropped bits of information. About the burned-out train that was dragged into town. About the ceremony the Germans went through in burying nine soldiers who had given their

lives for Vaterland in defending that train. About the French railroad engineer, a long-nosed little man who claimed to have killed a terrorist with a machine gun, and whom the Germans might give a medal.

"A disgrace!" old Lamarque said. "No respect for the law, those terrorists." Somehow, though, his words had a hollow sound and he went around the farm humming.

Being an old gossip, he took his half-witted farm hand that night to the Cafe of the Dead Rooster to get full details on the disaster that had befallen a certain train.

The cafe buzzed with talk. It was good the Germans did not invade the cafe that night to check papers of identity. Every face showed a certain warmth, undoubtedly brought on by the thought of exploding German ammunition. Jack of the Woods was roaring with good humor. Glisette suffered a more thorough public pawing than usual, but she slapped him only lightly.

Monsieur Porc Rouge came in late; his was the only unhappy face in the company. He sat and ordered his Pastis, mixed it with water until it achieved the required milky consistency. Dubois insulted him several times but he kept looking like a sulen blue-eyed pig. Thompson worried a bit about that. The man could have German soldiers waiting nearby to make arrests at his signal. There was a loud, snarling argument between Glisette and Dubois. She left Dubois at his table and came over to pay her respects to Farmer Lamarque.

"*Tien*, he is like a rooster," she said. "Always crowing about what he has done."

"Ah, but how the pullets chase that rooster!" Lamarque said, smiling.

She snorted and turned from the old farmer to Thompson, flashing her black eyes provocatively. "And what think you of the rooster, my old one?" she said.

Thompson stuttered. It was easy to stutter, with those eyes fixed on him. "*Je-je-je*—" he sputtered.

She laughed. "And he is always so mysterious, saying he has to meet someone at the slaughterhouse at midnight as though he were a great rogue." She chattered on. Thompson glanced at the clock behind the zinc bar. He sipped his wine and made an excuse to Lamarque. And at midnight he was behind the old slaughterhouse.

Jack of the Woods sat crouched in the shadows, sucking the dry butt of a cigarette. When Thompson joined him he went into a corner, took a paper from his pocket, and burned it to ashes. He was very quiet, and seemed troubled.

"Notes are bad things," he said. "Especially when the sender does not sign his name. But when you have a chance at thirty cars of important industrial chemicals—what can one do? Let them go rushing off to Tours, where they will be used to manufacture bombs?"

Thompson frowned. "You would not want to risk many men that way. Notes are—very bad, unless one knows the sender."

Dubois crouched down, hands on his chin, his dark eyes studying the damp ground.

"Derailing such a cargo would do no good. It cannot be burned. If the train turned over and there was a good rain, much might be destroyed. But they would save much of it."

"The railroad to Tours crosses the river," Thompson said.

Dubois nodded. "My thought also. You see, *mon vieux*, in this business we have not time for long-laid plans. It must be quick. Small groups of men striking hard and quickly and escaping quickly. We learn things from our friends on the railroad only a few hours in advance. For instance, those chemicals will cross the river at dawn. No more than five hours." He looked at Thompson questioningly: Thompson thought of the river. From Lamarque's farm you could see the railroad bridge, the long clean arches of it sweeping across the shallow, sluggish stream. The river was just deep enough that a train sprawled out in it would be completely under water.

"We need an electrical detonator," Thompson said.

"We have one. British exports are good this year."

"Then let's go."

It took an hour for them to stumble through the dark to a certain farmer's granary. When they got there a thin rain was falling. It always seemed to rain in that part of France in the fall, Thompson thought. They

left the granary with twenty kilos of explosive and the box-like detonator. The store of rifles that lay there they regretfully passed up. They carried too much already. Thompson tucked a Luger automatic in his pocket. Dubois was already armed. They slogged off through the muddy fields.

In summer the boathouse was a busy, cheerful place. Now it was deserted. Jack of the Woods picked the lock, and Thompson wondered about his trade before the war. He had spoken of sticking pigs for the farmers. But he picked a lock well too. Perhaps Dubois was not well loved by the police of Madame la Republique before the war. Thompson shrugged. That was long ago. Tonight it was good that Dubois knew locks.

They picked a small rowboat and slid it out into the water. Dubois took the cars and Thompson held the detonator and explosives on his lap. For a moment they hesitated, hidden in the bushes that surrounded the boat house.

"There are guards on the bridge," Dubois said. "They will be alerted because of what happened last night. It would be safer a week from now."

Thompson clutched the explosives tightly and thought of a rifle bullet mashing into the putty-like stuff. He shrugged. At any rate, it would be awfully quick.

"But the train will not cross the bridge a week from now," Dubois said. He shoved the boat off into the river.

To Thompson it looked safe enough.

The stone bridge was a vague shadow of gray lace in the rain. When the great bridge was such a hazy object, the guards would have trouble seeing a tiny boat.

The boat wallowed and took a little water. Thompson felt around for something to bail with. There was nothing. Jack of the Woods grinned.

"We have to hope the boat is not too dried out. We cannot bail." He rowed strongly, but tried to take the rising waves as gently as possible. The current caught the boat, swept it along. Dubois lifted his oars out and let the boat drift. The bridge loomed closer. Thompson saw the great blocks of stone; the arch looming ahead, the one they must destroy. If they could climb it and place a little explosive on the track, that would be enough. But they could not. The great pillar must be destroyed. And they had to use the detonator, for the train could be stopped without damage if the explosion were premature. Besides, he was counting on the terrific vibration of a heavily-loaded train to help destroy the pillar.

Dead silent, they crouched down in the boat. If the guards saw them, there would be only one answer—death. They would fight and hope to die in the fight, for both shuddered when they thought of the torture rooms of the Gestapo. Suddenly the rowboat scraped bottom.

Dubois leaped out, dragged the boat up close to the pillar. They unloaded the explosive and detonator. "They can see the boat too easily,"

Dubois said. He kicked the boat adrift. Above loomed the pillar, arches sweeping out in both directions.

"Around to this side," Dubois said. They lugged the stuff to the far side of the pillar. There a giant crack showed, and around it, places where the smooth rock facing was shattered.

"American bombers started the work for us," Dubois said. "Perhaps a two hundred kilo bomb exploded here. It made only an opening. Our little twenty kilos can do ten times as much damage, because we can place them so much better than a bomber can."

He probed with the pinch bar, dragged out broken stone until a hole was made some four feet into the pillar. They began stuffing the putty-like explosive in. Suddenly Dubois stopped.

"Did I tell you that the Porc Rouge is engineer on this train?"

Thompson flinched. He did not like the Porc Rouge. But he shuddered to think of the pillar blowing when the locomotive was on top of it, and the Red Pig leaning out, trying to see through the rain ahead.

"Poor Red Pig," Thompson said.

Dubois went on stuffing explosive into the hole. Thompson tore the packages open and Dubois took chunks of the stuff and jammed them in. When a foot was filled they laid the wire inside and put a cap on the end. Then a few more pounds of putty and another cap on the double wire. Finally the charge was all in and they stuffed broken rock around

it to seal the explosion inside, only the wire protruding.

When it was done Thompson took the detonator and Dubois coiled the wire around his body. Slowly they walked into the cold water and began swimming, Dubois turning round and round so the wire would pay out. Thompson's teeth chattered. He was a good swimmer and had no fear of drowning. But it was a long way to the bank, and the detonator was heavy.

The current caught him and he swallowed water. Then he was beyond it, swimming hard. It was so dark now that he could not see Dubois. After a while he felt muck beneath his feet. He stood up and waited until the Frenchman struggled out, dragging his wire behind.

They crouched down, wet and miserable, in a clump of bushes. Thompson rubbed his hands together feverishly, to make them usable. At last he opened the detonator box; he tested the equipment by joining the wires with his fingers, pushing down the handle. The shock hurt. He grinned.

"It bites, Jacques."

The Frenchman chuckled and gave him the wires. Carefully they spliced them together. Then there was nothing to do but sit and wait. After a while the rain stopped and they could see the hazy outline of the bridge.

"I hate to think of Porc Rouge riding that blast," Thompson said. "I don't like the man. As you said the

other night, he is the kind that thinks first of his family. But I hate to see—"

"You are wrong," Dubois said. Suddenly he stiffened. A whistle pierced the night. Then the furious grinding of wheels.

"It is nearly dawn," Thompson said. "That could be him. But why am I wrong?"

"Because," Dubois said. "Some Frenchmen take a long time to be convinced that they must fight. Some merely wait until the balance swings. On one side of the balance Porc Rouge placed his family and the work he must do that they may eat. On the other side—"

The whistle shrieked again, closer.

"On the other side, France, and what he can do for her. Tonight he strikes his blow for France. It will be a great blow. Porc Rouge sent me the letter. I know his handwriting."

Thompson felt his breath wheeze out. He jerked toward the tracks and the bridge above. The white knife of a train's headlight cut the night. There was a faint glow in the east, too. Porc Rouge's last dawn, his last train ride. Thompson pictured the fat red face and watery blue eyes leaning out of the engineer's window, calm as though he were sipping Patis. Knowing that suddenly the track would explode in his face. Knowing that there would be no last emotional goodbye to his family. Leaving them that night, it had to be the same as all other goodbyes. Knowing that he was only another train engineer working for the Germans because his children had to eat—

Dubois was staring at him. Finally he reached over and took the handles of the detonator. "I do not trust you," he said. He crouched down over the handles, eyes fixed on the bridge.

The train shrieked into sight. Two short whistles tore out. "The signal," Dubois said. "To mark it as him."

"Signal!" Thompson gasped. "He signals for his own execution!" He found his hands were clutching cold mud, that he was on his knees, staring at the rushing train. Dubois grunted, hoisted his full weight up over the detonator. Like a long black snake the train whirled to its doom. The engine was full over the arch.

"*Mon Dieu*," Dubois breathed, and he lunged down on the handles.

It was not a great explosion. Only a sheet of dull red flame that belched out over the water. The engine seemed to jump. Then it was flying ahead carried by its own momentum, but it was smashing through the stone bridge ramparts, leaping off into space, and like a black snake skeleton the long string of boxcars followed it.

"*Mon Dieu*!" Dubois groaned.

They watched the train double up and slam into the water. The arch had disappeared. They sat there in the mud, exhausted.

When Thompson finished telling me the story, he was not drunk. He was angry. He jerked his long red mustaches. He gulped a bottle dry and threw it in a corner.

"It seems strange that he survived," Thompson said. "But he had to think of his family. He had done his part

THE BRAVEST MAN

for France. When the explosion came he slid out of the window. The Germans fished him out of the river, and three months later he was in the Dead Rooster on crutches, drinking his bloody Pastis. Dubois saw him come in. 'Ah, Le Porc Rouge,' he howled at the trainman. 'You see how it pays to love Laval and Petain?'

"'Quiet,' the Red Pig told him. 'Some day you will be arrested, and they will think all in the Dead Rooster are as you'."

I sat there for a while and corked onto my brandy bottle. Somehow I

wasn't any more drunk than Thompson. "That wasn't nice, driving his train toward the dynamite."

Thompson lit a cigarette. "No. Oh yes, one other thing. You wouldn't mind if a bunch of us went along with you tomorrow?"

"It's completely against regulations," I said.

"Naturally," Thompson said. "Against regulations. At dawn?"

"Yes, at dawn."

Thompson sighed. Then he stretched out on the stone floor and was dead asleep.

Tree Trouble

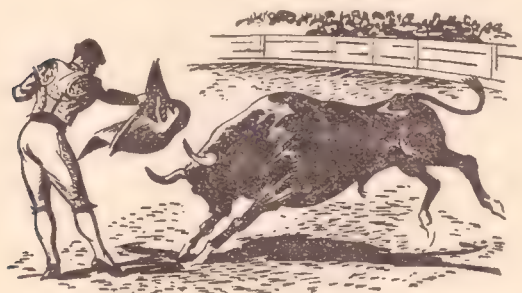
by HAROLD WILLARD GLEASON



*Graceful, beautiful, romantic
Trees by trout streams drive men frantic,
Making tempers flare and crackle
At the toll of treasured tackle.
(Tapered leaders, dry flies fragile
Snagged, evoking banter agile
From observers not thus hung up . . .
For the book, such should be strung up!)*
*Too, on rainy days or foggy,
Rendering anglers chill and soggy,
Lovely leafage drips and drizzles . . .
—Ten to one the outing fizzles!
Autumns hatch another trouble:
Every cast achieves a double—
Dead leaves hooked on tail and dropper . . .
Further source of jibes improper!*

*Trees we venerate and cherish—
May their shadow never perish!
Yet, O woodman, mark for slaughter
Trees abutting fishing water!*

This vivid account of the last corrida of a great bullfighter who wanted to end his career on a note of artistic perfection, is Borden Deal's first story for Adventure. From Mexico City, where he is now living, the author writes that he was . . . "born in the hill country of Mississippi on October 12, 1922, and graduated from the University of Alabama in 1949 after serving three years in the Navy during the late war. I have published previously in Tomorrow, 'Best American Short Stories,' Argosy, the Prairie Schooner, and I have just finished a novel called 'Go Down in the Valley,' to be published in the late spring or summer."



One Last Bull

by BORDEN DEAL

N EGRITO STOOD in the shade behind the *barrera* looking out into the hot sand, bright with sunlight, and there was only the thought within him: This is the last, this is all of it, and the thought was a hurt inside him that ached like an old horn wound. From where he stood, he could see the whole thing in all its familiar detail. The red-painted

wooden wall that was the *barrera* enclosed the arena of firm, raked sand where death came each Sunday afternoon at four. In the *barrera* were the *burladeros*, narrow gates through which one could slip into the safety of the *callejon*, the alley, that separated the *barrera* from the spectators, providing a gap across which the bull could not leap. In the alley were

the sword-handlers, the ring servants, the cameramen and the broadcasting stand. Behind all this was the white blur of faces in the safety of the seats that towered, rank above rank, high toward the bright sun.

He heard the music begin, calling him and the Gypsy out into the sun, out into the eyes of the crowd. He put his hand on top of his head, settling the hat firmly, and looked at the *cuadrilla*, those who would assist in killing the bulls, standing behind him in the gloom of the tunnel. "Vamonos," he said. "Let us go."

A red-shirted ring servant swung open the gate of the *barrera* and for the last time Negrito stepped through, paralleled by the Gypsy. When he was within view of the crowd, he swept his cap from his head and crossed himself and, underneath the theatricality of the gesture, there was the sincerity that had made him the favorite for so many years.

The applause rose as he was seen and the audience was standing, a white blur of faces, but he ignored them, parading with taut dignity toward the box of the authorities. His lean body was stiff and straight under the heavy, embroidered jacket and his dark, straight-lipped face was as stern and severe and controlled as his fighting style. But underneath it he was thinking of the old phrase of the bullfights, that a perfect bullfight needs sun and silk; and, he thought heavily, in all my life there has been nothing more than sun and silk—this is the end, and these are the last three bulls I will ever kill.

This will be the last, he thought, making a vow to himself, for he knew of the many old ones who had come out of retirement for one last *corrida*, one last season, coming back with slow wrists and tired legs and the timing gone bad, the head understanding, wise with the bulls, but, no longer able to use that hard-won wisdom, being tossed like an eager kid tumbling over the *barrera* in the *novilladas*.

He had sworn to himself that he would know when he must quit, that he would not continue beyond that day, getting contracts on the strength of his name. He had a strong sense of the fitness of things and such an ending would not belong to his career; that would not be the right ending. Now his legs were slowing down and he knew that it was time to go.

He stopped and stood looking up at the authorities' box, feeling the drama in him the way he always did, the slow, dignified staginess that emphasized and accented the deadliness of the performance. He held it for a moment, until the ceremony was over, and then he walked to the *barrera* and went behind it into the alley.

He put his hands on the splintery wood and leaned his chin on them, staring at the dazzling sand. Behind, the crowd was still standing, calling for him, but he ignored them.

"They have desires of seeing you," the Gypsy said, looking up from shaking out the folds of a cape.

"They will see me when I go out to the bull," Negrito said, not looking at him. "That is the moment for a *torero* to be seen."

Time flowed slowly for him as he waited for the first bull to come out. It had started being that way when he was dressing, as if he were moving through waist-deep water that rushed strongly against his body and it was as if he wanted the movement to be slow, as if he wanted the moment of the last bull to be farther away from him.

The bulls have been my life, he thought, I have thought of nothing else, I have lived nothing else, and he remembered the starting of the bulls in his life, when he had left his *pueblo* to walk and bum his way from one ranch to another at the time of the testing, looking for bulls, for cows, and even for lumbering steers, against which to try his cape. He remembered the first bull he had ever killed, in a *novillada* in Toluca, and how the sword had hit bone and had spun glittering in the air and Chato, who was in his first *cuadrilla* and had been with him ever since as his peon of confidence, saying, "Thou must wait, eager one, until his feet are placed together or there is no road for the sword," using the familiar toward him for the first time, calming him. And the next time the sword went in beautifully and the bull followed the muleta out, the horn missing his body by inches the way it should, and the bull stood for a moment, muzzle almost to the sand, and then fell, and

there was an ear and a triumphal tour of the ring for him. In that moment, he had known for the first time the perfectness of a conscious, controlled design in which there was nothing bad or false. It had been a long time, Negrito remembered, before he killed so well again, but after that time, Chato, through all the *novilladas* in small rings, with bad bulls and worse pay, had never become discouraged, believing through everything that Negrito would progress to his *alternativa*, to becoming a professional.

The bull came out of the gate fast, the black and orange colors of the breeder's ribbons fluttering above his hump where the barb had gone in. He was big and glossy-black and the hump of muscle in his neck was like a huge, clenched fist. Negrito watched while the peons ran him, and with two runs he was satisfied, knowing how he would have to fight him. He waved the peons aside and slipped through the slot in the *barrera*, feeling the sand through the soles of his slippers, feeling alive the way he always did when he entered the ring. He walked toward the bull thinking, he is good, with this one I can make something. Then a cold voice in the back of his mind said, *take care, Negrito, this is the last corrida.*

He unfurled the cape and held it before the bull, twitching it once at the proper moment, and the bull came, going for the cape, close but not too close, and Negrito wheeled with him, snapping the cape around fast to twist the bull and he knew that it was too cold and far away to

be good. He did it again, trying to bring him nearer, wanting to feel the brush of the big, black barrel as it went by, but again his hands led the bull close but not too close, for the little voice was still cold and clear in his mind.

He knew that his style depended upon the closeness, the way that a movie star knows that a certain way of smiling, a certain way of walking, is a trademark that is known and expected. He did not do any spectacular, daring things like sitting on the step of the *barrera* and passing the bull the way that the Gypsy and many others did. He fought the bulls classically, his body arrogant and sure, the passes slow and clean, with a severity of line and form like an etching. Without the tricks for the tourists who sat once in the comfortable *barrera* seats and left at the fourth bull, he had to bring the bulls closer and slower and more beautifully past his motionless body. But with this voice speaking he could not do it, so he ended it quickly by fixing the bull and walking away toward the *barrera*, walking slowly, his hands on his hip, his arrogant head raised to the blur of faces.

The *picadores* came out on the horses and he stationed himself, as was his duty, to take the bull away from the first horse and place it for the second *picador*. In this procedure it was also his duty and his art to make a series of passes with the cape, but he could not do it. He made a *quite* that placed the bull well, but that was all. There

are two more, he thought going into the alley, I can be good with the other two, knowing that tomorrow the reviewers would say that he had been cautious because it was his last appearance.

The Gypsy danced out and made his *quite*, doing happy *mariposas*, the ends of the cape swirling like the butterfly after which the pass was named, and he was rewarded by a burst of applause. He came back grinning and washed out his mouth with water.

"A good bull," he said. "A very good bull."

"Yes," Negrito said. "You have said. A good bull."

"It does not matter," the Gypsy said. "I need contracts for next season. That, you do not need. I have a little jealousy."

No, I won't need any more contracts, Negrito thought, watching the bull take the *banderillas*, his head tossing. Next season I will not have to travel in crowded, dusty cars touring the provinces, listening to talk of bulls and bulls and bulls, I will not have to endure the *aficionados*, the fans, who come to the unloadings and think they know something of the bulls, who say, "I wanted to be a *torero*. I could have been a great *torero* but my *mamita* . . ." and while he thought these things there was heavy sadness in him like a piece of lead in his belly.

He killed competently when the time came but there was nothing developed in the *faena*, the last act of the tragedy; it did not merge into beauty, for the passes were static and

unflowing. The Gypsy did well with his first in his happy, spectacular way, and there were some fluttering handkerchiefs but not enough for an ear. The crowd sat silent through Negrito's second. The Gypsy's second was a bad bull that had to be chopped with the *muleta*, not permitting a decent *faena*.

Negrito could feel the badness of the *corrida* as he waited for the fifth, his last, to come out. He had wanted it to be good, too, this last time, this saying goodbye to the bulls and to the life he had led for so many years. He wanted it to be a perfect ending to his career, an ending that would fit all the good things he had done. He saw the bull come, smaller than the others, and in the running he saw a hook to the left that he would have to watch very carefully. The Gypsy looked at him and shook his head as he prepared to go out with the cape.

"Watch the chop," Chato said and Negrito nodded, keeping his head down, his eyes intent on the cape.

He straightened and looked at the crowd that he had disappointed this afternoon. He had disappointed them before but always there had been another *corrida* in which he could be good again. The last time, he thought, looking at the small bull, knowing that the chop would be dangerous. He walked out into the ring and there was the cold, hard certainty he had known before, many times, and it had never been wrong.

He shook out the folds of the cape and the bull came, very close for the first time, closer than was wise with

that chop and with the bull fresh and unhurt. He heard the crowd wake up behind him, wake like a living animal scenting blood, and he could feel their excitement, their emotion, coming to him, mingling with his own emotion, and he and the crowd and the bull were all welded together in a pattern of death, a stylized ballet that flowed and merged, remained static for a moment, and flowed again. He knew he was being good and he felt the goodness of it in him, mixed with the sadness of knowing that he would never feel this way again.

The bull had turned immediately and come back again. Negrito built a series of *veronicas*, the cape flowing and swirling around him, molding a pattern. He finished with a *media-veronica* that pulled the bull around tight, fixing him, and turned his back, walking away, knowing that the bull would not move to spoil the effect. The pics came out, clumsy-looking on the bony horses, and Negrito leaned against the *barrera*.

"Tell them to pic to the left," he said to Chato. "I want that chop gone for the *faena*."

The crowd was still excited and the excitement was flowing out to Negrito. For the first time, he thought of afterward, of what would happen to him after the last bull was dead and of how, with what, he would live—and there was nothing there. I have lived here, he thought, looking at the sanded arena, there has never been an after. He had always told himself, when the legs go, I will quit,

ONE LAST BULL

never believing that the time would come. How could you believe such a thing when you lived with death each Sunday afternoon? The last bull then is the one with which you are unlucky, the one that kills you—not the fifth bull of a farewell performance.

He went out to make his *quite* and he made *veronicas* again, swirling and beautiful, the most classical pass of the cape, and finished with a series of *gaoneras*, wrapping half of the cape behind his body. He came back to the *barrera* and took water into his mouth, rolling it around and spitting it out. The sun was bright and on half the arena still. Sun and silk, he thought. Sun and silk and the bulls.

The Gypsy came by him. "I feel that I am going to make a very bad *quite*," he said. "This is the last."

Negrito did not smile, for he never smiled in the ring, but there was a feeling in him for the Gypsy. The Gypsy had been around for a long time, too, and he understood a little of it.

He took the *muleta* and sword in his hand, waiting. He had never thought of afterward and now he was. He had money, plenty of money, for he had not wasted it like so many *toreros*. There will be nothing to do but sit in the sun, he thought, and think of the bulls. Thinking so, he said to himself, in one more season I will retire. I will fight one last season of sun and applause and the good certainty on some afternoons. But he pushed the thought away. The legs are going bad. This is the last one,

the last dedication, the . . . the *banderillas* were in and the bull was waiting for him, standing in the center of the ring where the shadow of the stands just touched him. The blood was bright on his hump where the pics had worked and the gay *banderillas* hung all to the left. His head was lowered now and he was panting, watching with angered eyes the movement in the alley behind the *barrera*.

Negrito slid into the ring and walked to the spot before the judge's box, asking formal permission to kill. He stopped, facing the crowd, signifying that the bull was dedicated to the public. They were delighted, standing up, beating their palms together.

"I dedicate this, my last bull, to thee, my faithful public," Negrito said, the words slow in his mouth. "And to all of my bulls." He turned, then, toward the bull waiting for him and held the cape out toward him. "And, most of all, to this, the last bull I will ever kill." He tossed the cape over his shoulder and walked toward the bull, his hand busy pinning the sword in the *muleta*.

He squared himself inches from the bull's nose and fixed his feet, moving them for good anchorage, and then he was still. His wrist flicked the red rag and the bull came, slow and powerful, slow because the *muleta* was controlling him. Negrito felt the brush of the heavy barrel against him and when the bull was

gone there was blood on his stomach from the closeness of his passage. An "Olé" swelled slowly to a peak and then cracked like a jungle drum in his blood.

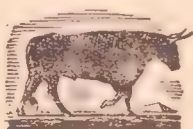
He wove a series of *naturales*, building a perfect *faena*, and with each one the *olé*s swelled and cracked in a hypnotic rhythm keyed to the movement of him and the bull. Then he did *pases de pecho*, with the bull going by his chest, his head and body surging powerfully up after the billowing redness of the *muleta*. There was nothing spectacular and false in the pattern, it was severe and classical and because of that the emotion was deep and true. Negrito could feel the control in himself, the discipline that held him and the bull and crowd in a created pattern of beautiful death. Doing that, the sadness ached within him, knowing that this was all, this was the last, and he would never again feel the stern joy that such control and discipline gave him. He finished the series with the crowd standing, shouting *olé*s. He knew it had been right, perfect, with every element in its place and, looking at the bull standing with his feet together, his head down, he knew that this was the inevitable moment to kill.

He walked to the *barrera* and changed swords, pulling the killing sword from the scabbard in Chato's hands. He looked at Chato, at his

broad, seamed, Indian face, and Chato looked at him, silent and unsmiling. Negrito gripped the sword in his hand, reluctant to go out to the kill, reluctant to finish it. But now was the time—the bull was ready and the time was right. He must finish and go, leaving the sun and the bright colors behind him.

He walked toward the bull again, his feet slow, not wanting to go. He passed the bull once, twice, and fixed him. Everything was right. He profiled, sighting along the sword, and, in that moment before going in, he knew the sternest, most beautiful, discipline of all, he knew the completion of a discipline greater than one bull, one *corrida*, or even one season.

He went in over the horn, the sword going in true and straight, and then he saw the horn coming, seemingly slow, but, he knew, very fast. He saw the horn coming and he had known forever the way to avoid it with a graceful movement of the body, with an outward swing of the *muleta*. But he did not move, watching the horn, holding himself there, and it was very slow and beautiful to see. Then it was into him and his feet were off the ground and he felt himself going up and coming down again and the horn was there, waiting for him. In the last moment, he knew, with that dreadful certainty, that this was the way to die.



According to "Who's Who," A. (for Alpheus) Hyatt Verrill is an author, artist, ethnologist, archaeologist and explorer. A graduate of Yale University, he has spent most of his lifetime in penetrating distant jungles, wallowing through tropical swamps, or climbing hazardous mountain peaks. He is best known for his explorations in the West Indies, Central and South America. He discovered and excavated a hitherto unknown civilization in Panama, and has led several expeditions in search of Mayan and Spanish treasure. Yet, despite an unusually active life, Verrill has found time to write one hundred and ten books, ranging from adventure fiction to serious works on the Mayan and Aztec cultures.



Chips from the Whaleships' Logs

by A. HYATT VERRILL

LIKE ALL other seamen, the oldtime whalemens had their logbooks, but these differed greatly from those kept by merchantmen. Aside from the weather, the position of the ship and similar nautical matters, the

whalers' logs contained detailed accounts of all whales sighted or taken, the amounts of oil and bone obtained from each whale, descriptions of strange places visited and accounts of any unusual or noteworthy event.

A Fact Story

In fact, everything that took place, either aboard ship or ashore, was duly recorded in quaint, terse, often curiously misspelled words—interlarded with fragments of verse and bits of homely philosophy.

In addition to the logbooks the whalemens had journals kept by the officers, and these often contained entries even more interesting and more unusual than the real logs. Both customarily began: "Remarks on board" or "Thus day begins" and closed with "So ends" or "Thus ends this day." For example the entry from the logbook of the *Montreal*:

"Remarks on Board the ship *Montreal*, F. L. Fish, master, in the Kamtskatkal Sea, Thursday, July 15, 1851. These 24 hours commenced with a light air and cloudy from southwards and westward the boats off chasing whales at 3 P.M. struck 2 whales and turned them up 7 miles from the ship and commenced towing them to the ship in calm, took them alongside with fresh breeze and rane from S. All hands sent below, at 7 called all hands and commenced cutting in, latter part puffy with a light air and a berg, heavy swell from S. All hands employed in cutting. At 12 M. had one whale in and hooked on other. So ends Lat. 60 53 N."

No matter was too trivial to be recorded. On days when no whales were taken there would be mention of how the crew was employed and often these were humorous. Thus, in the journal of the *Morning Star*, we find the entry; "Crew mostly engaged in peeling onions." In the journal of

the *Wanderer* it is recorded that the crew was, "engaged in skylarking ashore," while in still another journal we learn that the crew were, "mostly employed doing nothing." On a merchant ship an idle crew is practically unknown, but aboard whaleships it was a different matter. When whales had been taken, everyone aboard worked strenuously from the time the carcass was alongside until the last bit of blubber had been cut in and boiled down and the oil stored away. There was no rest for anyone regardless of hours, and so, between times, the men were allowed to loaf and rest and recover from their exertions in readiness for the next whale, and only the most essential work, such as patching sails, overhauling gear or repairing injured boats was done.

To the hardy whalemens "going in" on a whale, harpooning the monster with a hand "iron," and finally running alongside and driving a lance into his heart, was all in the day's work. Boats were stove by the whales' flukes or headlong charges, men were wounded or killed, and there were feats of almost incredible daring. But such matters, along with mutinies, attacks by cannibals or pirates, although duly recorded in the logs and journals were regarded as merely incidental to the whalemens' calling, unless very exceptional, in which cases they would be described in the most minute detail.

Reading these old journals one comes upon matter-of-fact records

of adventures that would make the wildest fiction seem tame.

In the journal of the ship *Awashonks* of Falmouth, Massachusetts under date of October 5, 1835, is a brief account of a near-tragedy when native islanders attempted to seize the ship. At the time the *Awashonks* was hove-to off Namarik, an island of the Marshall Group, to recruit natives.

About noonday, a number of the natives boarded the vessel and the captain, first and second mates went below for dinner, leaving the third mate in charge of the deck. When the others had finished their meal, Mr. Jones, the third mate, went below, and about fifteen minutes later rejoined the others on deck. At the time three of the crew were aloft working on the rigging, another man was on watch below and the others were forward with the exception of the man at the helm.

Suddenly, and without the least warning, the crowd of natives sprang to the whale spades and other razor-edged implements used in cutting-in the whales, and with wild yells dashed at the whalers on the after deck. A blow with a whale spade killed the helmsman. The captain was beheaded by a spade wielded by another savage, and the first mate was butchered as he leaped down the forehatch.

The second mate had run out on the bowsprit for safety but was caught and clubbed to death, while the third mate seized a spade and hurled it like a javelin at a native

about to cut him down. The savage dodged the weapon, which buried its blade in the woodwork, and the officer, who was the only member of the ship's company left alive on the deck, managed to gain the forehatch where the rest of the crew had taken refuge.

Afraid to go below to finish off the men, the cannibals shut and secured the hatches and then headed the ship for shore with the intention of wrecking her. In the meantime the three men still aloft descended as far as they dared, and slashing through the braces, allowed the yards to swing-to so that the ship, out of control, drifted toward the open sea.

Below decks the imprisoned men were busy, for the third mate had suggested a most dangerous manner of regaining their ship. Working their way aft the men secured muskets from the cabin; then, while they kept the savages away by firing through the skylights, the third mate broached a keg of gunpowder, emptied most of its contents on the upper steps of the companionway and laid a train of powder down the steps and across the cabin floor and, at the risk of being blown to pieces, he fired the train.

There was a terrific explosion and the companionway was blown out, killing and wounding a number of the cannibals who were preparing to rush the men below. Dashing through the debris, the third mate and his companions, with clubbed muskets, hurled themselves at the remaining savages. Too terrified at what had occurred to resist, the natives leaped into the sea. Short-handed as they

were, the whalemén got their ship under control and sailed away.

In the log of the ship *Polestar* of Rockport, Maine, is the entry: "This day began with light airs from S.W. Hove-to off Perang. At fore bels sighted ship's boat. Came alongside with three men and Mr. Avery, second mate of bark *Aurora*. All badlie wounded. Reported all others killed by Malays two days before."

As Captain Crossley listened to the survivors' story he cursed long and fluently. With his own crew and volunteers from other whaling ships in the vicinity he sailed for the scene of the piracy, where with his armed men hidden he handled his ship as if disabled, thus baiting the Malays who sped to the attack of what they assumed was a helpless vessel.

Not a pirate remained alive when the battle was over and in the yellowed log of the *Polestar* Captain Crossley wrote: "So ends this day with a good deede wel dun."

Mutinies aboard whaleships were not uncommon but as the whaling captains could not afford to lose men, either by killing them or putting them ashore, and unlike merchant skippers could not pick up new hands in the remote spots they visited, they devised some most unusual and at times ludicrous means of punishing the mutineers. One old captain boasted of having "headed up" the mutineer leaders in oil casks and feeding them through the bung-holes. "By Judas, after ten days of that there wasn't

no mite of mut'ny left in 'em," he declared.

On another ship the cooped fowls aboard were killed by a heavy sea and for several days an unvarying diet of chicken became too much for the men and they rebelled. But the mutineers were overpowered and the captain ordered them aloft where they were to "crow like cocks" until cured, while the mates stood by with ropes' ends and belaying pins to enforce the order.

The unusual occupation of the *Morning Star's* crew—"mostly engaged in peeling onions"—duly recorded in the log, was the punishment imposed for a mutiny that had been nipped in the bud.

At times, however, there were mutinies as bloody as any of fact or fiction, such as that on the bark *Athol* of New Bedford. Under date of December 25, 1853, it is entered in the log that: "This day begins fair with lite airs mostly southerly. This day being Christmas the men to be give shore leaf on the island where the natives are friendly."

It was to prove a far from merry Christmas for the officers of the *Athol*, for the men, smuggling rum ashore, became drunk, incited the natives and with them attacked the ship. Taken completely by surprise, the few trusty men and the officers would have been killed had it not been for the cooper, whose timely action is recorded in a terse entry in the log as follows: "About six bells skylark-ers come aboard with sum natives and attaked with spades, lances and

speers. Cooper forard fired on the men with lifline gun and junk. Most of mutinears kilt or wounded. Decks cleared and sail made at 8 bells. Light air. S.W. Cut cable and got under way under tops'ls. Middle part clear, fresh breeze S. So ends this 24 hrs with thanks to God for a happy Christmas."

It would not seem possible that a mutiny could have a humorous side, but such was the case with the mutiny that took place aboard the New Bedford schooner *Pedro Varela* in 1910. From any point of view, other than that of the vessel's officers, it was an out-and-out comedy and had no serious results for anyone concerned. After cruising fruitlessly for six months, with barely enough oil to "grease their boots" as the saying is, the men became heartily fed-up with whaling and longed for dry land. Since the crew was pretty much rick-rack from the slums and gutters and far too cowardly to stage open mutiny, the men devised a unique but effective scheme to force the captain to return to port.

During the night watches everything movable that was connected with whaling was tossed into the sea. The wholesale sabotage was not discovered by the officers until a whale was sighted and they found it utterly useless to attempt to "go in" on him. Not a lance, harpoon, spade, weapon or implement was left aboard. All the cursing and fuming in the world would not restore the jettisoned implements and finally, having placed

the crew in irons, the captain headed for Fayal. An American war vessel was in the harbor and after a preliminary hearing eight of the *Varela's* men were placed in the cruiser's brig and taken to Boston for trial.

The Court was in a quandary. The officers admitted there had been no open mutiny, that none of the men had refused to obey orders or had threatened the officers. Moreover, they could not swear the men *had* disposed of the missing implements. In other words there had been no mutiny as defined by the law.

The sentence finally imposed by the judge was, perhaps, the most amusing part of the entire fiasco, for each of the eight men, who had been brought home in comparative luxury aboard the warship, was sentenced to ten days in jail for "disturbing the peace."

Naturally, the taking of whales was the greatest source of the whalemen's dangers and adventures. Desperate battle with the leviathans are recorded in practically every log and journal and some seem almost unbelievable. But whalers were not an imaginative lot, they recorded only what actually occurred and there was no need to embroider the events. Stove boats, boats crushed in the jaws of sperm whales, ships rammed and sunk by wounded infuriated whales, men killed or crippled were all matters to be expected.

But occasionally some unusual event would take place and would be

recorded in detail as, for example, the epic battle that took place between Captain Haskins of the bark *Wanderer* and a huge right whale.

The story as outlined in the log is as terse and matter-of-fact as always and states: "In forenoon sighted rite whales two miles West. At 2 P.M. struck both whales and mate turned his up six miles from the ship. Captain's boat stove and he was atacked by the whale. For three quarters hour captain swam dodging and diving, the boats standing by, and drove the whale off sticking him in the nose with his nife. Captain bruised some but not much hurt. Took other whale alongside in calm. Fresh breeze came up and ran from E at 11. All hands sent below and commensed cutting in. Latter part cloudy with lite air. Medium swell from S.E. All hands employed cutting in and boiling. Lat. 51° 35' N. So ends with ship full up."

The cruise of the bark *Alexander* of New Bedford, in 1835, turned out to be, perhaps, the most unusual whaling cruise on record. And the entries in the ship's journal are fully as odd as the cruise itself, for they were made by the cooper, Ephraim Billings.

As his entries show, the voyage was an almost continual drunken orgy on the part of the officers, and nearly every page of Billings' journal ends with: "May God have mercy on this ship!" . . . "God knows what will become of us all." . . . "May God grant this voyage is soon over" or "Thank God another day has passed."

For some time the cooper made daily notations as to the condition of the captain and mates, stating that: "The Captain was middling drunk" . . . "All hands came aboard drunk" or "The mates very drunk." But he soon abandoned this as a bad job and waste of time and noted only the more unusual occurrences, such as: "Captain only a little drunk" . . . "Some hands sober" . . . "Mates not so drunk," and once or twice, "Captain not drunk today."

Only on one occasion is there an entry to the skipper's credit. This was when the captain, temporarily sober, thrashed an insolent member of the crew and Billings recorded: "This is the best deed the Captain has done on this terrible voyage. Pray God he may repeat it often."

The poor cooper had a bad time of it and became very homesick. On every anniversary of his birth, marriage or the death of his wife he underscored the entries with heavy black lines. Like many others who kept the whalemens' logs he never wrote in the first person but always as someone else as: "This day is the birthday of Ephraim Billings, cooper of the bark *Alexander*" or "The cooper remained on board, all others being ashore drunk."

Billings' troubles came to an end when the captain had him arrested on a charge of mutiny in a South American port, the mutiny consisting of appearing on deck in his stocking feet!

He was rather grateful for being arrested, for he found the prison, bad

as it was, a welcome change from the ship, and when the captain sobered up and tried to induce the cooper to return to the bark he flatly refused and recorded in his own journal: "As God knows I know too much of what goes on and what to expect." He finally obtained transportation home and closed his journal with the entry: "Never to go awhaling again, please God."

Probably the most amazing entry ever set down in a whaleship's log is that in the log of the ship *Monongahela*, Captain Jason Seaburry, who in 1852 was cruising for whales off the west coast of South America. The entry made by the captain tells of his boat "going in" on what they supposed to be a sleeping whale and then states: "As we approached we saw it was a long-necked monster that rushed at the boat. I instinctively held out my iron and the sharp point entered its eye. I was knocked overboard and felt a deep churning of the water around me. I rose to the surface and caught a glimpse of the writhing body and was again struck and carried down. I partly lost con-

sciousness under water but recovered it. When I rose again in the bloody foam the snake had disappeared and I shouted to pick up the line. The iron was fast and the monster was fatally wounded. When the ship came up to the boat three other boats were lowered. We lanced the body repeatedly without eliciting any sign of life. To make sure, we continued to lance it and at last the monster drew itself up and we pulled away for safety and witnessed its dying struggles. It was a male, the length 103 feet 7 inches. He gave but little oil. So ends this day."

Imagine actually battling with and capturing a "sea serpent," or whatever strange creature it was, and then—wholly commercially-minded as the whalemens were—stripping off its blubber and boiling it down for oil which, as the captain rather ruefully recorded, was "but little."

What a pity that the captain or some of the crew did not preserve the monster's head or skull as a souvenir. Perhaps someone did . . . Perhaps in some New England attic, in a musty old sea chest filled with seashells, curios and other "junk," the skull of the "sea serpent" may be hidden away and forgotten.



Seventeenth century Britain saw a unique passenger service in the form of a small sailing vessel which coasted the shores, close under the land, stopping upon a hail to send a fly-boat ashore for passengers or goods. These vessels were called "hoys" and to hail one it was only necessary to stand on the beach and call "Hoy!" The deep breath necessary before shouting this word became Ah; or the complete hail "Ahoy!"—to this day the mutual hail of ships or sailormen when crossing tacks. —Carl D. Lane.



The highly improbable tale of three fighting men—Flight-sergeants Brisbane, Morton and Thornley—who, collectively, comprised—

Special Squadron 13

by CORNELIUS MORGAN

THE BRITISH FORCE at Sidi Omar, made up of a mixture of tongues, religions, and customs—English, Anzacs, East Indians, Free French, Poles, Greeks—roasted under the North African sun. Heat! It singed the hair in your nostrils if you took a deep breath. The men of the mechanized units swore it was cooler inside their tanks.

Air Vice-Marshal Trotter had his headquarters in a camouflaged tent near the airfield. He was a wiry little man with a gray, closely-clipped mustache, thin silver hair, and an expression of inward pain on his face. He was not exactly popular with the men, being a bit of a stuffed shirt and too small of stature to suit the accepted requirements of a leader, although his

tactical genius was fully recognized.

A young pilot officer had just reported his flight reconnaissance over Bengazi. "The defenses have been strongly reinforced there. We met unexpected opposition from the *Luftwaffe* which cost us two of our planes."

"Von Gunther, I suppose?" The little Air Vice-Marshal's face was very pained. Leutnant von Gunther was the reigning German ace in Libya, flying a blue Messerschmitt. He had thirty-one R.A.F. scalps to his belt, or so he boasted. British and South African pilots had had more than one close look at him in combat. He flew without a flying helmet, a man of thirty or so, his head shaven completely bald. Some swore that he flew with a monocle in his left eye, though how he kept it there while traveling at speeds over three hundred miles an hour remained a mystery.

The Air Vice-Marshal dismissed the young pilot officer with a remark that he was disappointed by the day's results. Too many bombers were being lost over Bengazi. Alone, he picked up a letter he had received and read it again.

Confidential.

From: Air Marshal Egerton-Lees
British Forces, Cairo.
Air Vice-Marshal Sir Ffoillet Trotter, KCB, DSO.
R.A.F. Desert Commander.

Sir:

Upon their own and persistent request, I am sending you Special Squadron 13, A.R.A.F., comprising Flight-sergeants Brisbane, Morton

and Thornley. They should be a valuable addition to your air force. I am bound to say that they are accustomed to the privileges of commissioned officers, which privileges they have taken here, with and without permission. On several past occasions they have been offered commissions in return for their spectacular air fighting. However, it seems that they do not wish to accept promotion beyond their present rank as flight sergeants.

Do not be misled by the lack of decoration on their uniforms. Each one of them has been awarded the D.F.C., Brisbane being additionally presented with a bar to his cross. The awards had to be mailed to them, in lieu of military acceptance.

Air Marshal Bodley Charters, commanding the R.A.F. when they were in Greece, sent them as a unit to me. He, in return, received them from Air Marshal Barrington in England, after they had distinguished themselves in the defeat of the *Luftwaffe* over England in 1940. Both Air Marshals wished me well of them, and now I respectfully wish you the same.

It must be granted, I presume, that their splendid services to our Cause, should excuse their several eccentricities. Personally I have found it wiser, and I may say, less troublesome, to look at it that way. In conclusion let me say that Cairo will be a better place to live in now that they have gone, and that I personally, already feel ten years younger.

Believe me, my dear sir, to be,
Your obedient servant,
Egerton-Lees.

Air Vice-Marshal Sir Ffoillet Trotter, K.C.B., D.S.O., didn't at all like

the contents of that last paragraph. He was a bit afraid that Special Squadron 13, A.R.A.F., was going to upset his digestion, already bad almost beyond repair. At any rate, if Special Squadron 13, A.R.A.F. could get rid of Lieutenant von Gunther for him, he was willing to swallow a few extra pills.

As he studied the letter, Sidi Omar quite suddenly resembled a disturbed ant-hill. Out of the fiery east came three planes, their motors singing a peculiar hum that was not considered friendly. Men shaded their bloodshot eyes to watch them. When first observed they were a tiny triangle of black dots against the crimson sky.

At a height of 6000 feet they flew over the position. Then, as if tied together by wire, they executed a turn-over and power-dived down cleanly angled at the Air Vice-Marshal's headquarters. The maneuver was so sudden, so brilliantly accomplished, that men fell over each other in rushing to their anti-aircraft and machine guns. Before a shot could be fired the three planes, diving at a speed somewhere around five hundred miles an hour, could have blown the Sidi Omar headquarters into strips of canvas. No bombs were dropped, however. Only as the flyers straightened out and swooped upward again, like a kite, did they fire their machine-guns, harmlessly into the Libyan desert.

And now word went around that they were British planes. Men picked themselves out of sand-holes, crawled from beneath trucks and tanks, sitting

up with gaping mouths to see what would happen next. The terrific roar of their dive came again. With another flip-over, down they came as a team, straightened, side-slipped into the field, each plane touching wheels to the ground simultaneously as they ran to a stop, their triangle formation not changing by so much as an inch—or so it seemed.

With Squadron Leader Eric Bradley, the sweating personnel of the Sidi Omar airfield surrounded the visitors to see what manner of birds they were. They certainly arrested attention.

Flight-sergeant Ronny (Angel) Brisbane, the youngest, was twenty-two. He had the innocent blue eyes and cherubic face of a choir-boy, hence the nickname. Possessing the wrists and hands of a prizefighter, he was mild-mannered and quiet-spoken—when he spoke at all. Up in the sky, his voice was that of Thor, for then his guns spoke for him, devastatingly and straight to the point.

Flight-sergeant Les (Wallaby) Morton warranted his nickname because his elongated face with its strangely flat nose had a kangaroo look about it. To further the resemblance he would amuse people by nibbling at a piece of lettuce or bread, wriggling his nose and ears as he did so, and then about all he needed was a kangaroo's pouch.

The third Aussie, Flight-sergeant Mark (Goldie) Thornley, had the shoulders of Atlas, a red face, blue eyes, and a golden beard parted in two.

"We've been expecting you." With the rest of the watchers, Squadron Leader Eric Bradley was gazing spell-bound at the golden beard. "Show the sergeants to their quarters," he told a corporal.

"Show us," Thornley ordered regally, "to the nearest canteen—if you've got such a thing around here. I finished my last quart on the trip over from Cairo."

"Same here," Wallaby said. "Make it a bee-line, Corp, and don't step aside for the scorpions."

Shortly after their arrival, Captain Forrs, aide to Sir Ffoillet Trotter, entered his tent with a package under his arm. It was shaped like a sickle.

"This is for you, sir."

The Air Vice-Marshal began to unwrap yards and yards of cheese-cloth from the package, considerably irritating him. The gift proved to be a beautifully polished boomerang with a silver plate on it inscribed to him from Special Squadron 13, Australian Royal Air Force.

His face lost some of its look of pain as he balanced the piece of wood on his small hands. "I must say this is rather handsome of them. See that they are comfortably quartered, Captain. I'll see them in the morning. No hurry. Give them time to shave and wash-up."

"Shave!" Captain Forrs didn't know what to say. He allowed his ejaculation to remain, saluted, went out.

Meanwhile the newly-arrived Aussies lined up at the makeshift bar in

the suffocating R.A.F. mess, drinking whiskey that even when diluted tasted like molten lava. Squadron Leader Bradley introduced several of his pilot officers to them, all of them friendly and good-natured as they described their experiences in desert flying.

"Ever flown over Tripoli?" Thornley asked them, sweat glistening on his golden beard.

"We've bombed it twice from here."

"How was the going?"

"The usual flak."

"What's the distance?"

"Around seven hundred miles."

Near them a pompous little air-supply major openly showed his distaste at having non-commissioned officers in the mess. His back was deliberately turned to Thornley, and he was speaking in a high, piping voice about his connections in England, particularly of his friend Lady Victoria Farthingale, Grand Dame of the British Empire, at whose country estate he had stayed on numerous occasions.

"Pardon me," Thornley interrupted him. "Did you say Lady Victoria Farthingale?"

"I did." The chubby major looked the bearded giant up and down.

"Relation of mine on my father's side," Thornley remarked. "Bit of a stickler for form, my old man. Broke clean with Vicky the moment he found she ran a bawdy house on the side—"

"A what! Are you referring to Lady Victoria Farthingale, sir?"

"That's right—old Vicky. Lord! what a rascal she was, under that false wig of hers. Do anything to make an extra penny. Sold dope, if you please." He turned casually to Flight-sergeant Morton. "You remember, Wallaby, when Scotland Yard men tried to question me about her dope activities."

"Wasn't that the time when she tried to borrow money off your Aunt Bessy?"

"No, that was after Aunt Bessy had served her stretch for embezzlement. Poor Aunt Bessy!" he sympathized. "I still don't believe she stole that dear old blind woman's nest-egg."

"Of course not," Wallaby said, imperturbably. "You know as well as I do that your own mother did it."

"Them's fighting words, soldier."

"His mother couldn't have done it," Ronny Brisbane put in. "At that time his mother was running opium into Tasmania. I remember reading about it when I was a kid of sixteen."

Wallaby put on a look of incredible amazement. "You mean you could read when you were sixteen?"

But Mark Thornley wouldn't let go his end of the bone. He drained his glass with considerable gusto, parting his magnificent beard. "Yes, a damned queer family—ours. And the Farthingale family too," he told the speechless major beside him. "But keeping a bawdy house! And right in her own home at that!" He shook his head sadly. "No, that was a bit too much—even for Aunt Bessy."

"I should say so," Wallaby agreed.

"Got to draw the line somewhere." But the little supply major had moved away. He'd had enough!

A big fellow in a khaki shirt and shorts entered the mess, the Australian infantry insignia on his sleeves. He was Major Woolverton. The moment he saw the man with the golden beard he let out a roar of welcome.

"Mark Thornley! The Shah of Melbourne! And Wallaby! And Ronny Brisbane! Well I'll be damned! How did you hornets get here?"

Thornley was pumping his hand. "Polly Woolverton!" he greeted him. "The last time I saw you was in Capetown."

The major laughed. "What a night that was!" Heartily he shook hands with Les Morton and Ronny Brisbane, then nudged Squadron Leader Bradley beside him. "These boys are going to do you proud," he said, and half-whispered in his ear, "but you better order plenty of headache powders right away."

Major "Polly" Woolverton had known Thornley in Melbourne, where John Thornley, his millionaire father, lived in a palatial house. The other two he had met on the boat sailing for Capetown, Ronny Brisbane, former bank-clerk, and Les Morton, former sheepshearer. In point of deviltry and reckless daring they were alike as peas in a pod. Instantly all three had fused together, become inseparable.

"What on earth ever brought you to this hell-hole?" Major Woolverton

inquired, perspiration streaming down his sun-baked chest. "Lord!" he told the squadron leader, Bradley, "you should have seen the capers these birds cut up in Capetown, the day we docked there."

The S.L. said he would like to hear about it.

"I reckon Capetown has borne the brunt of the Anzac's attack so far, seeing that it's the halfway point in the long sea trip to England. The boys promptly take over all the bars and buses, push each other around in street sweepers' carts, kiss all the pretty women, raid the breweries, and engage in riots with the anti-British Afrikanders.

"The day these blokes reached there, they commandeered the town's dray horses and held a Melbourne Cup Race down the main street. I believe you won that race, didn't you, Goldie?"

The huge Thornley grinned with evident relish of the event.

"He won it," Wallaby said, "by charging clean through every obstacle in his path. Motor cars, tram cars, traffic cops, peddlers' carts—it made no difference to him. Me—I always have a regard for human life and property."

"You sure have," Brisbane told him. "You and that cousin of yours—Adolf Hitler!"

Major Woolverton glanced at his wrist watch, and quickly gulped down the first drink that came to his hand. "Good Lord!" he said. "I must be going. Our tanks and armored fighting vehicles are moving up right

away. See you blokes again." Hé was gone.

The S.L. took the Flight-sergeants in charge, finding them grub and temporary quarters for the night. In the meantime their Beaufighters were checked over and re-fueled by the R.A.F. mechanics. As darkness fell Blenheim bombers took off into the velvety night, into which—far to the west and north—searchlights weaved back and forth like long thin quills of paper. Continuous gunfire could be heard, splashing the horizon with bursts of yellow and pink.

Thornley had spread a map over his knees. The S.L. had given them a plan of operations, and the three of them had painstakingly studied it under a shaded light. Ronny Brisbane then went to check with the S.L. as to the possible targets for the night. Now he returned.

"The Blenheims have gone to unload on Bardia and El Gazala," he said. "We can play around Azeiz without interfering with the A.V.M.'s plans."

"Righto! Let's have a bit of fun, and then hit the hay for the night." Les Morton's kangaroo face was distorted in a terrific yawn as he stretched his arms.

Ronny looked at the bare sand which was to be their bed. "Hit what hay?" he said, suddenly slapping his thigh as though something had bitten him. "Wallaby! What's that you said about scorpions a while back?"

"I said they tasted like shrimps if you fried them in sheep's fat and garlic. Come on, let's go."

They walked through the dark towards the airfield, amidst the roar of Stirling bombers taking off and the rumble of tanks and motorized infantry fading into the desert as they went forward for the morning's attack.

"What shall we give 'em? The lame duck game?" Wallaby asked.

"Why not? These North African Heinies aren't on to it yet."

The "lame duck game" was a night air-maneuver which played hell with the operators of enemy searchlights. In different parts of the fighting front searchlight crews had died without knowing what had struck them, so swiftly had Special Squadron 13 put their *coup-de-grace* into effect. It consisted of great daring on the part of Ronny Brisbane—who played the part of the lame duck—and perfection of timing on the part of Morton and Brisbane.

Ronny usually went in at a height of about 8000 feet, pretended to be trying to get away from a hooked-on searchlight, or searchlights, then fluttered and fell in a spin as though he had been hit. This held the searchlights' attention. In the meantime Morton and Thornley had widely separated from each other, and from Ronny. With their motors off they dived from a great height, and from different angles, right down at the base of the searchlights, the two Beau-fighters crossing each other as they fired and pulled out of the dive. The result was the sudden blasting into

eternity of searchlights, the operators, their crews, and any anti-aircraft personnel which happened to be in the vicinity. By the accuracy of their instruments, synchronized in advance, and by perfect timing, all three fighters joined up together again, to repeat their reckless maneuver elsewhere.

It could only be performed at night, but it would have been miraculous to watch. Indeed their simplest maneuvers were worth watching, even the way they took off together in their triangle formation and then suddenly sky-rocketed into the air as though they had been shot from some gigantic ground-gun.

Tonight, after a forty minute run, Ronny, the leader, picked his two weaving searchlights, and went in with his neck for sale. The triangle immediately broke up, Morton headed due west, Thornley due east. There, at a height of twenty thousand feet they cruised in circles, waiting for Ronny to get tangled up.

They didn't have to wait long. He began by "jinking" onto his intended target—a process of flying whereby the plane alters height and course, swerving up and down and from side to side as the searchlights tried to hold him. Streams of tracer bullets, ranging in color from orange to greenish-yellow were floating up toward him. They seemed to travel slowly, falling back to the earth in a fountain of fire. Then, suddenly, Ronny would give up his jinking and began his maneuver.

Morton and Thornley acted in-

stantly, gliding down, dropping hundreds of feet every second, holding their noses and blowing hard to ease the pain in their eardrums due to the terrific increase in atmospheric pressure. Down they came to cross each other like black comets, holding the fire of their 20-millimeter cannon and six Brownings until the exact moment when they could speak with the most devastating effect.

And then, for one instant, the sudden inferno of their gunfire, coming from nowhere, froze the blood of men on the ground! One instant only! In the next their blood was being spilled into the Libyan sand, and in darkness; for the brilliant rays of their searchlights had been extinguished like snuffed candles.

"Home James!"

CHAPTER 2

It was 11:15 P.M. when Special Squadron 13 returned to the Sidi Omar airfield, received the signal to land, and came in with their customary precision. The three Aussies seldom spoke of their exploits, except to correct a mistake or find ways of improving on a particular maneuver. They never congratulated one another. There were plenty of bullet holes in Ronny's plane, which the ground crew would repair. Bullets couldn't bring the Beaufighter down, unless they struck a vital spot.

The three walked in silence to their tent, feeling their way in the dark. "No," Mark Thornley said casually.

"I think you're wrong about them scorpions. You shouldn't fry 'em. They taste much better boiled with a pinch of salt."

"That so?" Wallaby said.

"I don't mind telling you," Ronny said, "that I'm scared stiff of scorpions."

"Jeepers!" Wallaby suddenly clasped a hand to his breast pocket. But it wasn't a scorpion. It was something much more important to them than that—something that had brought them to Sidi Omar and the desert where, at least, they would be in flying distance of their objective, Tripoli. "Jeepers!" Wallaby said again, "that map!"

"What!" Both Thornley and Brisbane halted instantly, staring in the dark at Wallaby.

"I must have left it in my kit in the tent."

"If you've lost that map," Thornley told him, "I'm going to fry you in sheep's fat and garlic, like you fry scorpions."

"I've said right along," Ronny put in, "that he shouldn't be trusted with the map." All three had quickened their strides to the tent. "What we ought to do is make duplicates of it, so that each one of us has a copy in case of—" he was going to say "death" but he didn't—"in case of accident."

They reached their tent, and by the aid of a shaded light Wallaby vainly searched his kit.

"That's done it!" Ronny groaned. "Goodbye to my castle in Spain and all my plans for the future."

Mark Thornley gave a shout. "Here's the damned thing lying on the ground!" He picked up the map, folded to the size of an envelope. "That settles it," he told Wallaby. "It must have fallen out of your pocket. Carelessly throwing a million pounds away! From now on I'll keep the map."

"Go ahead and keep it," Wallaby agreed, mopping the sweat off his face and neck. "Taking care of the dam' thing gave me the jitters."

"I'll make copies of it the first chance I get," Ronny said, preparing a makeshift bed.

The map had a very interesting history. When Special Squadron 13 was transferred to Cairo, it was not long before their practical joking began to annoy officialdom. At the British headquarters there was a liaison officer, Captain Percy Bobb, who seemed made to order for them. A tall willowy officer with pale eyes, he had a straggly mustache drooping from his mouth like the whiskers of a seal. He spoke several languages fluently, and had been an archaeologist before the war, residing in Tripoli.

The three Aussies met him during the interrogation of some Italian airmen they had brought down. They were highly amused by his flowery speech and air of great learning, particularly his absorbing interest in antiquity and bygone civilizations.

One day Mark Thornley brought him a clay nest of oval, dark-brown stones which he said he and Les Mor-

ton had found in the Syrian desert when they landed there to repair a broken gas line.

"There was an old Irak shepherd digging a well for water, and we went over to him. We were looking around, when we saw this nest of stones he had dug up," Thornley said. "I had an idea they might have some significance. The old shepherd had no use for them, so I brought 'em along thinking you might be interested."

Captain Percy Bobb's interest was as eager and expectant as a terrier watching a rat hole. "Extremely obliging of you, Sergeant," he thanked him. "A most remarkable discovery indeed! If I am not mistaken these are the eggs of some large prehistoric reptile—quite possibly of the Triassic period."

"Well, they're yours!"

The enthusiasm of the seal-mustached liaison officer was such that he almost had a stroke. "My dear fellow," he swooned, "do you realize what you are giving away? This is a find of great value."

"We've got no use for them," Wallaby said. "Keep 'em and write a book about 'em. Compliments of Special Squadron 13, A.R.A.F."

About two weeks later, after the Cairo newspapers had published an account of Captain Bobb's phenomenal discovery, the British Military Headquarters received a letter from the curator of the Alexandria Museum, strongly condemning Captain Bobb, and accusing him of having stolen the dinosaur eggs from their reptilian hall. General Maitland im-

mediately ordered Captain Bobb's arrest, and he was under guard for several days before the matter was cleared up with the Aussies being thrown in the brig instead of the innocent captain.

Despite the damage to his prestige and name, Captain Percy Bobb took it in good part, holding no particular grudge against the perpetrators of the joke. In fact, on their release from the guardhouse, he invited them to be his guests at dinner in one of the expensive hotels.

Considerable wine was consumed, and here again the tall willowy captain was no match even for the angel-faced Ronny Brisbane. Indeed the former archaeologist got very drunk under their pressure, and quite suddenly slipped under the table. An orderly helped him to a cab which drove him to his quarters.

Meanwhile there were several bottles of wine still uncorked, and the three Aussies saw no reason why the festivities should be suspended with the funereal departure of their host. Wallaby's foot kicked something under the table. He bent down and came up with a folded bit of parchment which, upon examination, proved to be a map.

For a long while they couldn't make head nor tail of it, for the writing on it was almost illegible and in Italian. Only one word made any sense to them, the word Tripoli.

Mark Thornley and his golden beard poured over the parchment at great length. "This is a map giving minute directions to a specific place

in the garden of a house," he announced. "Look! The place is marked with a tiny cross."

"Captain Bobb lived in Tripoli didn't he, before the war?"

"Yes. He was the archaeologist who found the burial place of some great Egyptian King," Thornley said.

Wallaby looked at him, his eyes blinking. Ronny Brisbane was beginning to get excited. "Maybe we've got something here!"

"It's worth looking into. First off, we'll get this writing translated. And we'll do it without showing anyone the map."

"How?" Wallaby asked.

"We'll copy the words down on a piece of paper, and get some bird to tell us what they mean."

This was done. Many of the words baffled the linguist whom they consulted, but even at that the partial translation staggered them.

. . . emeralds unsurpassed for beauty . . . blood-red rubies, some the size of walnuts . . . Chaldean King . . . several million pounds at lowest estimate . . . garden . . . my house . . . buried there because . . .

That was all that could be translated from the illegible writing on the side of the map. But it was enough! The instructions to the spot where the treasure was buried in an old iron box were fairly clear. So many paces N. W., other paces N.E. would form a triangle. In the center of this triangle was a cypress tree. Fifteen metres due south from the tree lay the buried treasure.

"Let's go," Wallaby said. "What's holding us back?"

"Just a few Germans and Italians, that's all," Thornley remarked.

"Goldie," Ronny Brisbane asked him, "how long d'you think the war will last?"

"Hell, we ain't going to wait for that." In his eagerness to go loping off, Les Morton looked more like a kangaroo than ever. "We've got to pay a visit to Tripoli right away."

Thornley stroked his beard. "We've got to figure this thing out," he agreed.

Further scrutiny of the map, and a reading between the lines, tended to prove that Archaeologist Bobb had discovered the jewels during the excavation of the tomb of the Egyptian King, and evidently had not fully reported the extent of the treasure. The Aussies therefore considered they had as much right to it as he had.

Meanwhile, as they made requests to be transferred to the Libyan desert fighting, Captain Percy Bobb created something of a turmoil in Cairo with a frantic effort to trace a certain map he had lost. "What map?" he was asked. He refused to say. For reasons of his own, he declined to reveal why he prized the map and what exactly it represented. He would only say it was a parchment map, about a foot square, of the environs of Tripoli.

To pacify him and ward off any suspicion that might be cast in their direction, the Aussies planted the map in a linen basket of the hotel they had dined at, planted it in such a way that it would be discovered and returned

to its rightful owner. Which it was. But not before Ronny Brisbane had painstakingly made an exact copy of it.

As yet they had no plan as to how they could get into Tripoli, but the battle for Libya had started and they could at least fly over the place. It now had the fascination for them of some Golden City, irresistibly drawing them onward to the complete disregard of danger and obstacle.

In the morning following their arrival at Sidi Omar, they were paraded before Air Vice Marshal Sir Ffoillet Trotter, K.C.B., D.S.O. They gave him a kind of salute which raised his gray eyebrows a little.

"Well, Sergeants," he smiled, "it was kind of you to present me with this boomerang. I suppose, as Australians, you are all adept at handling it."

The Aussies didn't say so.

"You will, of course, take your immediate orders from Squadron Leader Bradley. The chances are that we will be moving to a more advanced airfield in the course of this battle. The Germans are rushing fighters, bombers, supplies of gasoline and anti-tank guns by transport planes and heavily-laden gliders in a desperate effort to gain the advantage. They are coming across from Crete, Greece and Italy."

He stared profoundly at Mark Thornley's golden-beard, meticulously parted, smiled, and transferred his eyes to the choir-boy features of Ronny Brisbane.

"From all I hear about your prowess at air fighting," he said to them, "those transport planes and gliders should make a fine dish for you."

Again he paused. "I should look forward to hearing the result of your brush with a certain blue Messerschmitt 109F. There is a German ace operating around Bengazi by the name of von Gunther."

"We've heard of him," Thornley said.

"Flies with a monocle in his eye—so they say."

"Yes, sir. Before we bop him, we've decided to shoot that eyeglass out of his head first of all."

"Well, good luck to you." The little Air Vice-Marshal shook hands with them, wincing under the pressure, and again elevated his eyebrows when they failed to offer him a salute.

Big four-motored Boeing Flying Fortresses were returning to the base after bombing enemy tanks and supply columns on the El Ageheila-Agadabia Road, south of Bengazi. They had not got off scot-free, and an ambulance car ran out to meet them, taking off the wounded men.

The three Aussies looked the big American-built planes over, marveling at them and the Douglas Boston reconnaissance planes. A flight of Stirling bombers were taking off, protected by a flight of Hurricanes. The S. L. thought the Aussies might like to accompany them over the Rezegh plains, where an Australian tank division was locked in combat with German Panzer units.

The three Aussies decided they

would certainly like to see that, climbed into their flying kit, and shortly took off with their customary dazzling display.

In a short time they were over Rezegh where, from the air, the tank battle looked uninteresting. The Stirling bombers went on to drop their bombs on supply columns. There was little enemy air activity, and the few Italian and German fighters were quickly scattered by the Hurricanes. Special Squadron 13 went on in the direction of Bengazi looking for von Gunther.

They didn't expect to be lucky enough to find him, but to their delight they did. Over Benina, they were recklessly engaged by nine Heinkels.

It was the sort of dog-fight the Aussies loved. In their first maneuver, coming as a team right through the German formation nosing upward at terrific speed to knife through them from an angle, Ronny Brisbane shot two of the Heinkels down in flames. That nickname of his was never more of a misnomer than when his blue eyes looked over his gun-sights. There was nothing angelic about his eyes then! The light in them was not a pretty thing to see. The Beaufighter seemed to recoil from the short, sharp bursts of his Brownings. Recklessly, he made sure that his bullets were not wasted, going in for the kill as if he were about to crash the enemy in mid-air collision.

Wallaby put another Heinkel out of commission, while Mark Thornley's guns stitched oblique lethal holes

into a German cockpit. The others streaked for home before the Aussies could assemble in formation again.

And then it happened!

Unknown to them, a Messerschmitt 109F had been sitting aloft waiting to pounce. Leutnant von Gunther! Down he came now like a peregrine falcon; the black swastika on his pale blue fuselage. His intended prey was the Beaufighter piloted by Les Morton. His blazing guns ripped and tore into the Beaufighter's tail and seemed to knock the plane sideways. Wallaby felt the thrust of a hot darning needle in his left arm. He peeled away with his customary skill, the sturdy Beaufighter taking her blows gallantly, like a staggered boxer.

Thornley and Brisbane were not in position to give Wallaby much aid, but, as usual, following out one of their special maneuvers, he dived and twisted and turned over on his tail—for all the world like a sailfish trying to throw the hook—all the while bringing von Gunther nearer the sword-thrusts of Brisbane and Thornley.

Suddenly they took over in a concerted attack. Brisbane came down on the Messerschmitt at an angle, while Thornley came up from below, one of them crossing underneath von Gunther, the other over him. It had bewildered enemy planes before. It now also bewildered von Gunther for an instant or two, and that was all the Aussies needed to plunge in the sword. Their guns had already

belched out their hate in the very instant they crossed, and the Messerschmitt shuddered violently with the impact.

Bewildered, possibly hurt, he sought protection in a dive. It was just what Brisbane and Thornley had hoped for. The latter had looped as soon as he had passed von Gunther. Now he also dived, following Brisbane down. The Beaufighter had the speed of the 109F, and the end was in sight.

It had been a false move on the German's part. Not immediately discernible, perhaps. But it was like a false move in the earlier part of a chess game, a move that as time went on, and the opponent strengthened his position, made it impossible to call the move back and prevent a check-mate.

Again the two Aussies, keeping von Gunther in a trap, dived in on him. But this time Ronny Brisbane peeled away—out of danger, not of the German's guns, but of Thornley's! The latter went in for the kill. Thornley—it all happened in an instant—could see von Gunther's bald head. Was he really wearing a monocle! It seemed so. At any rate one of his eyes had a peculiar shine in it, like the glassy eye of an eagle. Perhaps it *was* a glass eye, the sun's light on it making it shine.

Mark Thornley grimly watched his tracers, lifting the nose of his Beaufighter a fraction. . . The monocle, or glass eye, vanished in a spouting of blood! Von Gunther's pale face, even his bald scalp, became a crimson, spouting mass of blood, as if his whole

head had been shot away, the Brownings slamming through to him behind the partial protection of his glass-house.

The dead man continued to hurtle down in a dive, a dive from which he never pulled out. When he struck, a puff of dust, like a burst bag of flour, rose up from the ground. Then the flour exploded into red and black smoke as flames completed the job, cremating Leutnant Helmut von Gunther who, if he had brought down 31 R.A.F. planes, would bring down no more.

"Home James!"

They allowed the crippled Wallaby to lead, Brisbane and Thornley ranged on each side of him, a little to the rear. From the ground the Axis anti-aircraft fire poured up at them, without avail. Soon the three Beaufighters were minute dots flying into the S.E. sky, while behind them, in the waste of the arid desert, a fierce bonfire burned many things to a crisp: fabric and instrument panel, swastika and ersatz rubber, wood, clothing, furlined boots and bones.

By some legerdemain (in reality radio communication from witnesses on the ground) news of Mark Thornley's kill had gone before him. A great cheer went up as Special Squadron 13 returned to its base. Ronny Brisbane was the first to reach Wallaby's plane, inquiring with anxious blue eyes. Wallaby was grinning, but he didn't move from the cockpit and the right shoulder of his coverall was stained with blood. He had been hit, not through the arm as he had thought,

but under his collar bone, back of his armpit.

When they lifted him down he spurned the use of an ambulance, walking toward the field dressing station supported by the huge Thornley who knew enough not to sympathize with him.

"To begin with," Thornley growled, "you damn-near lost that map with a million fish wrapped up in it. Now you damn-near—" He broke off. "What's the idea? Trying to hand us your share of the loot?"

"I forgot to duck," Wallaby said, staggering a little from loss of blood.

CHAPTER 3

In the field the besieged forces in Tobruk were trying to break through and join the Imperial army under General Malmesley. The gigantic tank battle around Rezegh remained in doubt, the German Panzer units putting up a terrific fight, although the British mechanized division was cutting heavily into their strength. Reinforcements were on their way to both sides, the fighting continuing day and night, and the R.A.F. still masters of the Libyan skies.

Every bit helped. Ronny Brisbane and Thornley, getting permission from the lenient S.L. to act as a team, took off—as one of them put it—"for a bit of game shooting." On the third day following Wallaby's injury, they tangled up, over Capuzzo, with a flight of six Italian Fiat G-50 fight-

ers. Thornley shot down two of them. Following out a plan—a plan of deep cogitation, having for its end a crazy scheme for getting into Tripoli—the two of them hoped to capture a Fiat intact. This meant maneuvering it into a position alone, away from the rest of the flight, ushering it into the Sidi Omar flying field, and forcing it down there.

Ronny Brisbane's usual reckless threat of crashing an opponent in mid-air, only to have the enemy decline, failed, this time, to work. The Italian youngster must have frozen at the controls. Ronny was in so close, and at such blinding speed, that he couldn't avoid a crash! Their wings hit!

The Fiat G-50 broke into three separate pieces, the main part curling up in flames as it fell to the sandy waste five thousand feet below, the parachute of the pilot tangled up in it.

The Beaufighter never proved her durability to better advantage. The right wing was bent over and back toward the fuselage like a hairpin. All but a small piece of the aileron had snapped off, but that piece continued to work. The crippled ship was a comical sight in the air as she continued to make weather and fly! Pilots and ground crews at Sidi Omar gaped as they watched Ronny Brisbane—"one of those nutty Aussies"—bring her in. The sheer miracle of the Beau's performance brought about prolonged cheering.

Air Vice-Marshal Trotter had been on a tour of co-ordination to the sev-

eral R.A.F. advanced bases in Libya. On his return much correspondence awaited his attention, and amongst the papers were the recording officer's reports of Special Squadron 13. He immediately sent for the three flight-sergeants, congratulated them on their removal of von Gunther, and for the way young Brisbane had brought home the wounded Beaufighter.

"I—er—have a communication here," he said, "from Colonel Tennyson of the British Intelligence in Cairo. I should like to read it to you."

He picked up a paper, the line of his mouth a trifle severe, yet his gray eyes twinkling now and then.

"Dear Marshal," he read, "it has come to our attention that you are in possession of a specially-grained boomerang, plainly marked with an inscription on an embedded gold plate, to wit: 'Presented by George Hall, Esquire, Australian Commissioner of Works, to His Majesty King Fiesal of Egypt on the occasion of his twentieth birthday.'"

The Air Vice-Marshal looked up at the three blank faces staring at him, then went on reading.

"It is a matter of embarrassment to the British Intelligence not only to find that this gift has been stolen from His Majesty's library, but also to learn that it is in the possession of a distinguished soldier of the Crown whose Military record, up to now, has been without blemish—"

He laid the communication down, pursing his thin lips, mopping his brow.

"To begin with," he asked them,

"what have you done with that gold plate? The one you removed in order to substitute a silver one inscribed to me?"

The Aussies looked at one another in a fine display of simulated consternation. It was Les (Wallaby) Morton who eventually spoke. "Why we bought that boomerang in a Cairo pawnshop thinking it would be a nice gift to present to—"

"I can stand a joke as well as the next man," the little Air Vice-Marshal interrupted him, "but this time the boomerang is going to backfire on your heads. In view of your brilliant exploit in downing von Gunther, I'll give you one chance. I want that original gold inscription plate in my desk within half-an-hour, on penalty of one year's detention in the brig for all three of you and the permanent disbanding of Special Squadron 13. That's all, Sergeants."

The latter threat was too much for them. The gold plate was on his desk soon after.

As a unit, of course, they were grounded until Brisbane's fighter was repaired and Wallaby's shoulder fully healed. But before long they were ready to take to the air again. Meanwhile the great tank battle continued around Rezegh, both sides suffering great losses, the Germans trying to break through the trap. Tobruk had been relieved.

"Why the deep cogitation?" Thornley asked Ronny Brisbane one evening in their tent.

"I've been thinking."

"That way madness lies," Thornley quoted from Shakespeare.

"Madness?" said Wallaby. "We're all nuts, anyway."

"Something tells me I'll soon be in Tripoli," Ronny said, "digging up that treasure. Help me get one of those G-50's and I'll be in Tripoli within the next twenty-four hours."

Accustomed as they were to the Aussies' crazy stunts, Sidi Omar watched an unusual sight late one afternoon: a Fiat G-50 being maneuvered into the airfield by three Beau-fighters under constant threat of their guns. The Italian and Mark Thornley landed simultaneously, and before the Fiat could be damaged or set on fire the pilot was gazing into the talking end of a revolver. He was taken prisoner, and put under guard.

A smaller man than Thornley or Les Morton, he was roughly about Ronny's size, not so broad of shoulder. This automatically elected Ronny to the driver's seat, much to the disappointment of the other two. Furthermore he alone had a smattering of the Italian tongue.

Around midnight that same day Thornley and Wallaby managed to engage the attention of the Fascist airman's guard, while Ronny, a ration sack under his arm, dodged inside the guardhouse.

"Quick! Get out of your uniform!" he said in a mixture of Italian and English. "Me—great friend of Mussolini. *Si, si, si!* I help you escape. Clothes in sack. Make it snappy!"

The Italian hurriedly stripped, Ronny picking up his uniform, wrist-watch, papers, and cap; leaving the ration sack behind him, which contained nothing more than the Adam and Eve apparel; fig leaves.

In fifteen minutes Ronny was attired in the uniform of a Fascist airman, the jacket tight about the shoulders, but fitting him fairly well on the whole. Aboard the Fiat there was gasoline for a six hundred mile run, enough for Ronny's needs. He had already studied the Fiat controls and instrument panel. Now he climbed in, solemnly shook hands with Thornley and Morton, took an oath of fidelity to their respective interests in the treasure, and took off into the purplish night, a three-quarter moon playing hide and seek with black clouds.

"Crazy as a sheep-tick!" Wallaby said, watching him go. "How the hell does he expect to get back?"

"Dunno," Thornley grinned, sluicing the sweat out of his golden beard. "I guess he didn't stop to think of that."

"Another thing! If he's captured with the diamonds, we can kiss our share goodbye."

Thornley whistled, letting go with a full oath. "That's something I didn't consider. We've got to do some more thinking—fast."

"Why the hell didn't we think before letting that nut have his own way?"

"Well that's us," Thornley said. "Neither one of us ever did a sane thing in our lives."

They claim that love of money is

the root of all evil, breaking up the strongest friendships, driving men to murder and the most desperate of acts.

If Wallaby was thinking in those terms, his levity was out of place; for he now commenced giggling until, finally, he was doubled up with laughter.

"He—he couldn't wait to get off," he stammered through his laughter. "And the poor chump w-went off without the m-map—showing him where the t-treasure lies b-buried—"

"How do you know he went without the map?"

"I p-pinched it back again—from you—hid it in a safe p-place." Wallaby couldn't stop laughing, but Thornley quickly brought his merriment to a halt.

"Don't worry," he said. "He memorized it. And so did I."

The Fiat G-50 roaring through the night, headed west. Ronny took the ship up to ten thousand feet, and before he had gone fifty miles a number of British searchlights caught him, hooked on, and he was heavily fired upon from the velvet black down below. Savage bursts of orange lights kept flashing on and off. One shell, sixty feet behind and slightly under him, was a close shave, making the Fiat wobble. Ronny was painfully reminded of the other Fiat that had cracked in three pieces like a wafer.

He put the ship's nose up out of danger, the British anti-aircraft firing on the increase. Out of the night

two Spitfires flashed past him like gigantic bats! "God!" Ronny thought, "This is where I get it at last. Shot down by the R.A.F.! That'll make nice reading in the home papers!"

He called upon all his natural-born flying skill, diving, side-slipping, pulling her up, twisting, again diving. The searchlights had lost him and so, apparently, had the Spitfires. Ronny knew the Fiat wouldn't have had much chance with them. He thanked his luck and also the fleeting clouds that every now and then completely blacked out the moon.

After three hours of flying by the instruments, he was in sight of Tripoli, clearly marked by weaving searchlights and gunfire from hundreds of different points. R.A.F. bombers were over the Italian stronghold, and great flashes farther north told of a concentrated shelling from the sea by British warships.

In front of him, quite suddenly, a single searchlight flashed him some sort of signal, permitting him to land. But Ronny flew on, carefully avoiding coming down until he was sure of two things: a walking distance to the western environs of the town, and a landing comparatively free from observation. A ten minute period of moonlight gave him an opportunity. From a height of eight thousand feet he cut his engines and glided down to the desert, coming to a bumpy stop.

From then on he acted swiftly, having planned exactly what to do. He sprinkled the Fiat with gasoline, lighted the prepared slow-match, then ran as fast as he could for the shadowy

outskirts of Tripoli, revolver at the ready, for since he wore an Italian uniform, capture would result in certain death before a firing squad. His only safety was the town.

Three hundred yards from the Fiat he watched it catch on fire. It was blazing fiercely when he reached the cover of some buildings. He glanced at his Italian wrist-watch—4:17 A.M.

Although possessed of an excellent memory and sense of direction; although he, Thornley and Morton had studied detailed military maps of the streets of Tripoli, Ronny was unable to orient himself for a while. Constantly on his guard, yet walking boldly, expecting every moment to be challenged in Italian or German, he finally located himself in the Via Mizda.

He immediately branched off to his left, walking through a residential quarter of the town up a hilly slope of palm trees and darkened Tunisian villas, several of them smashed by bombs. Soon it began to get light, the sound of the gunfire slackening. Ronny crawled into a ruined and deserted house, made his way to the cellar out of which several rats scurried.

Conserving his food supply, he took a nip of brandy from a flask, and prepared to sleep through the day. He consoled himself that he was actually in Tripoli, that he had nothing to lose except his life, and everything to gain. Mad? Certainly! But there you have Ronny (Angel) Brisbane!

He emerged around five o'clock the following evening, freely mixing with the people on the streets; Fascist and

Nazi soldiery, ragged and starved-looking Tripolitarians and Algerians, most of them begging for alms. He walked on unmolested up a long, winding street called Ben Cardane, knowing precisely where he was. But when he came to the end of Ben Cardane he saw that he was utterly wrong in his calculations, or the big military map he had studied in Cairo was out of date.

There was no street called Sirte, which he had expected to find. The name plastered in a wall in white letters was Brachstrasse.

Possibly the Germans had changed its name, but now he was completely bewildered and retraced his steps down the Ben Cardane, resigned to spending another night in the cellar. He stopped outside a dilapidated restaurant down four broken stone steps, boldly entered and ordered some food. A wretched stew was placed before him, smelling vilely of rancid cheese and garlic. He ate every bit of it, paying with some of the Italian money taken from the prisoner in Sidi Omar.

The Tripoli waterfront was again being visited by R.A.F. bombers. The double *boom-boom* of exploding bombs intermingled with the staccato yapping of German flak kept volleying through the deserted streets, which, like a *coup de théâtre*, reflected the red glow of burning oil tanks and storage supplies far away. Twice he was challenged by Italian patrols, but his pass and other credentials, taken

from the man whose uniform he wore, satisfied them. Ronny began to feel easier.

It was a little after eight o'clock the next evening, clouds blotting out the moon, the night sultry, Tripoli free from bombardment, licking its wounds. Ronny had finally decided that the street now called Brachstrasse formerly must have been called Sirte.

He was proceeding along it, on the look-out for an isolated villa surrounded by cypress trees and a stone wall, when something convinced him that he was being trailed.

It was impossible to see more than a few yards behind him, or in front. But every instinct warned him that his suspicions were true. On impulse he took refuge in a doorway, revolver in hand, listening. There were no sounds of footsteps, not the slightest moving shadow. Silence, absolute silence! Uncanny!

All at once he was confronted by a big Italian officer wearing a ferocious black beard, the man seeming to materialize from the humid air! Ronny thumbed back the safety catch of his revolver, was about to slam a bullet into him, when his arm was knocked aside.

"Take it easy, you chump!"

The voice at once proclaimed him! Mark (Goldie) Thornley, his beard dyed black!

It was fantastic! Ronny couldn't bring himself to believe it.

"How in hell did you get here?"

"Dropped off a Stirling bomber last night. Thought, maybe, you'd need a hand. We've picked up an Ital-

ian soldier who speaks English—”

“We?” Ronny inquired.

“Wallaby’s here, too. He dropped off the same bomber.”

“Where’d you get the uniform?”

“We ran into a bit of trouble with an Italian outpost on the desert. Had to dust all of ’em off. Took a couple of their uniforms. Later on we grabbed a prisoner as we entered the town. His name is Benito. Nice guy. He’s grown very fond of us.”

Ronny groaned. With Thornley and Les Morton messing things up, killing men and taking prisoners, they hadn’t the remotest chance of leaving Tripoli alive.

“Where is Wallaby?”

“Guarding Benito. Despite his protestations of love for us, we feel it’s best to keep the pinch on him. He says the Villa Napoli is now occupied by General Staresi of the Italian Army. He’s going to take us up there around midnight. So let’s go. Wallaby took Benito out shopping and came back with a couple of roasted ducks and a gallon of wine. We’ve got a cosy place in a deserted house, and figured you’d be hungry by this time.”

Ronny still couldn’t believe it. It was true enough, however. There, large as life, was Les Morton in the bare kitchen of a crumbling house, dressed in an ill-fitting Italian uniform stained with its former wearer’s blood; and with him was a thin, black-jowled Italian soldier, shivering to his boots with fright. He stared at Ronny with pathetic consternation.

“Good evening, *signor*,” he said.

Ronny was also greeted by Wallaby. “Hey!” he said, “Ain’t I seen you some place before?” He was nibbling on a duck leg in his comical fashion by wriggling his nose and ears. The poor Italian youth was too scared to laugh.

Stuck in the neck of a bottle a piece of candle threw a ghostly light on the rotting walls. The one window was barricaded on the outside by rusty elephant iron. The stillness, the hush of the street outside, was suddenly invaded by the sound of marching men. An Italian or German patrol! All four men in the room were rigid as the clank of boot on cobblestone came nearer, nearer, finally passed and faded away.

“About twenty-four hours,” Ronny said.

“For what?”

“Twenty-four more hours to live. Gimme some of that chow.”

The roast duck was good, the Chianti better. Around midnight, guided by the quivering Benito who kept crossing himself every now and then as he murmured his prayers, they went up the Brachstrasse, coming to a stop outside a white villa, its grounds and gardens surrounded by a brick wall. The whole place was in total darkness, seemingly deserted of life.

“You kill General Staresi?” Benito asked in a trembling voice, not knowing their intent.

“No, no, no,” Wallaby told him. “We’re just going to pick a few flowers in his garden.”

Noiselessly they swarmed over the wall, taking Benito with them, and after considerable difficulty, on the *qui vive* for any sound from the house, they ultimately paced off a triangle in the east cypress garden. In the tri-section of this triangle was a larger cypress. From this tree they measured fifteen metres due south, figuring it at about sixteen strides. At this spot they were completely hidden from the villa by what seemed to be thick bushes of rhododendrons. With the trowels they had brought with them they commenced digging.

In the dark Mark Thornley's foot hit some spiked object struck in the grass. Feeling it with his hand it appeared to be a little cross.

"Wait!" he whispered to the others. "Here it is! I'll bet a million dollars. X marks the spot. Dig here."

All three went to work with a will, making the least noise possible, sweat running down their faces, arms, and legs. They had dug a space roughly four feet square, and down three, when Wallaby's trowel struck something solid. To their strained ears it made a sound like a bursting bomb.

"By God!" Wallaby whispered. "We've found it! It's an iron chest—by the feel of it!"

"It is, at that!"

"Quiet, boys. Let's clear the earth away from it. Be careful not to make a sound."

They were digging now with their bare hands to prevent the scraping of their trowels. Bathed in sweat, eyes agleam with expectation, they finally uncovered a small iron chest measur-

ing about two feet long, a foot wide and a foot deep. Lifting it up it seemed disappointingly light to be the receptacle of jewels valued at several million pounds. At any rate, here it was actually in their possession!

"Let's be off," Wallaby said.

"Just a moment." Mark Thornley had become a trifle suspicious. He was thinking of that small iron cross he had found stuck in the ground. He was also thinking of the comparatively light weight of the casket. Casket! "Let's take a look at it!" he said.

Dropping on his knees he threw a shaded flashlight on the cover of the box, and began rubbing the dirt off it with his fingers. There was a momentary silence, an expectant hush, and then Thornley began swearing violently under his breath.

"Well I'll be a—!"

"What's wrong?"

"We've been done! Done, good and properly! Browned to a turn, mates!"

"You mean it ain't the treasure we're seeking?"

"It's the treasure all right. Listen! Let me read you what's written on here. 'Sacred to the memory of Popo who died August 2, 1939, aged four years. For a marmoset he had an almost human intelligence. Mourned by his master, Percival Vivian Bobb, F.R.S.A.'"

"What's a marmoset?" Wallaby asked in a miserable voice, speaking through the soles of his boots.

"What is it? Why a monkey, of course."

"A w-what?"

"A monkey!"

There was a wretched silence.

"Popo, eh?"

"Popo the monk. And that's precisely what Percival Vivian Bobb has made of us. Monkeys!"

Ronny Brisbane visualized the tall willowy liaison officer in Cairo, with pale eyes and straggly mustache.

"Those dinosaur eggs we palmed off on him!" he grinned.

"That's it. I never thought he had it in him."

"He must have planted the map under the table, when he slid down drunk."

"Maybe he wasn't drunk."

"And the squawk he put up about wanting to recover the map. Oh, he was subtle, right enough. He took us in—hook, line and sinker."

There was a profound silence, broken by Ronny Brisbane's giggle. "What now?" he asked.

"Home James!"

Home? They were going to have a tough time reaching Sidi Omar again, or any British post. The escape seemed all the harder now that they were returning empty-handed. Suddenly Mark Thornley said, "Where's Benito?"

In their eagerness and excitement to uncover the treasure they had forgotten all about the Italian. Seeing his opportunity to escape from them, he had stolen away.

"He hasn't gone to fetch us a bottle of cold beer," Thornley said. "You can be sure of that."

"The best thing we can do is to

crawl in this grave with Popo, the monk," Wallaby said. "Sacred to the memory of three crazy Aussies who—"

"Come on—let's get away from here on the double!"

A light went on in the villa. Somebody in the house was shouting out orders in Italian. The Aussies needed no further warning. They scaled the wall, ran down the Brachstrasse and branched off along the first lane to the south.

"We've got to get rid of these lousy uniforms," Thornley panted.

"They might help us to escape."

"Not now. Not with the hue and cry after us. They'll only help us to a blank wall and twelve bullets apiece!"

"What'll we wear for clothes?"

"Our shorts. It'll be too hot for clothes, anyway, the way we'll have to travel."

"You'll also have to get rid of that beard, Goldie. That spinach you've got on your face is a dead give-away."

"I can't get rid of it without a razor."

"Burn it off," Wallaby said. "I got matches."

They threw their Italian uniforms down a well, reluctantly buried their revolvers, and in an abandoned shed Mark Thornley was shorn of his pride and glory, Wallaby singeing his beard to the roots, burning his chin. "You ought to be able to run faster," he said, "with that wind-breaker gone."

It was the only thing they could do. And now the gravity of their situation, the utter absurdity of put-

ting their heads on the block for a "treasure" that never existed, silenced them. It was agreed that they should stick to the same story: that their Stirling bomber had been shot down at sea off Tripoli the night before, that they had stripped off their clothes and swum ashore.

CHAPTER 4

While it was yet dark they managed to reach the southern outskirts of the town unmolested. From there they pushed on into the desert. But they had reckoned without the fierce African sun. Bare-headed, the cruel rays blistered their shoulders, arms, and backs, and they realized that they couldn't go very far. Thirst, and flies, now attacked them, though no word of complaint came from their lips.

Toward noon a Junkers 87 wheeled over them, flying low as the crew made an inspection.

"It won't be long now," Wallaby said.

It wasn't long. The Junkers swooped over them for the second time, the Aussies throwing themselves on the ground as the Germans fired on them, the machine-gun bullets kicking up little puffs of sand. The plane then proceeded toward Tripoli.

But an hour later two armored cars came over the northern horizon and came astonishingly fast. The helpless Aussies waited for them, their hands in the air. There was little else they could do.

The armored cars were Italian, and the officer in charge got out and approached them on foot, revolver in hand. He began questioning them in Italian, words they couldn't understand, even though the import was plain.

"R.A.F.," they kept saying.

They were taken prisoner, ordered aboard one of the cars, returned to Tripoli. First of all they stopped at an Italian outpost where they were given some luke-warm water to drink. A lieutenant now questioned them in their own language.

"English?"

"Yes."

"All three of you officers?"

"That's right."

"Where are you from? What is your base?"

"Sidi Omar."

"How did you get here without clothes?"

They told their story, saying they had participated in the bombing of Tripoli two nights before, had been shot down at sea. Two of their crew of five had drowned, they said. They themselves had managed to reach shore and hide in a cellar. Last night they had crept out, were trying to escape back to their lines when they were caught. The attitude of the lieutenant gave every evidence that their story was believed.

As prisoners of war they were treated with the consideration given officers, supplied with a meal, then taken to the concentration camp on the Derg-Gadamas Road, some thirty miles south of Tripoli. There, the

Aussies quietly congratulating themselves that it was an Italian and not a German camp, their relief and hopes for escape received a set-back; for they were paraded before the *Lagerkommandant*, Hauptman Buettel.

His name suited his brutal close-shaven head with saber scars on his pasty cheeks. His little gray-blue eyes had the coldness of ice. He sat rigidly behind a battered desk in a suffocating office cluttered up with files and papers. Portraits of Nazi leaders lined the walls. Another German officer was present, also an Italian officer, and a girl holding a stenographer's pad. Four armed soldiers stood by the door. The girl, dark-haired and dark-eyed, plump and not bad-looking, gazed with sensual admiration at Mark Thornley's magnificent physique.

Herr Buettel, the *Kommandant*, evidently spoke no English, the Nazi officer beside him having to do the questioning and translating. His first words at once told them what they were in for.

"What have you done with the Italian uniforms you were wearing?"

The Aussies put on simultaneous looks of astonishment. "Italian uniforms?"

"Yes, where have you hidden them?"

Thornley said with a fine show of pride, "The R.A.F. uniform is good enough for us."

"You entered Tripoli two nights ago disguised as Italian soldiers. That much we know."

"You're crazy," Wallaby told him.

"What were you doing in the garden of the Villa Napoli?"

"Never heard of it."

"You had designs on the life of General Staresi—didn't you?"

"Never heard of him."

"What was your purpose in digging a hole in his garden—a grave that contained the remains of a dead monkey belonging to an archaeologist who formerly lived there?"

Thornley burst out laughing, and was joined in it by Morton and Ronny Brisbane until, with a slap of his hand on the desk, Hauptman Buettel roared out an order in unintelligible German.

"You'll find out this is far from a laughing matter, I assure you," the Nazi interpreter informed them. "You are charged with entering our lines disguised as Italian soldiers, and that charge is punishable by death."

"And I tell you," Thornley bluffed at the top of his voice, "that you're all wet. As wet as we were when we swam ashore—"

The Nazi officer dismissed this excuse with a wave of his hand. "What were you doing at the Villa Napoli?" he asked again, his face distorted with anger. "You'd better tell the truth."

"I guess," Thornley grinned, "you'd get better results if you questioned the monkey."

"You deny the charges against you?"

"We've told our story."

"You are willing to add perjury to the seriousness of your military crime?"

"We've committed no crime. We'll take our medicine as prisoners of war, but you can't pin any crazy story on us about Italian uniforms and a dead monkey."

The *leutnant* translated their answers to *Kommandant* Buettel, the girl writing the evidence on her pad, apparently being familiar with the English tongue. Buettel rapped out an order, which was repeated in Italian to the soldiers at the door. One of them turned, went out, and the next moment a thin, dark-jowled Italian soldier was in the room.

Benito!

"Corporal Durazzo, you recognize these men?"

The young Fascist stared uncertainly at the huge Thornley, plainly confused by the absence of his magnificent black beard. His bewildered eyes turned to Morton and Brisbane.

"Hurry up! Do you recognize them?"

"*Sì, signor.* I recognize this one," he said, pointing to Les Morton. "Also this one," he slowly added, indicating Ronny.

"Where did you last see them?"

"In the garden of the Villa Napoli. They were digging for something."

"They were holding you prisoner, weren't they, at the point of a gun?"

"*Sì, signor.*"

"Against your will they had forced you to take them to General Staresi's villa?"

"*Sì, signor.*"

"That's all. You may go."

This evidence was translated to the *Kommandant*, the Fascist soldier

going out, the girl's pencil scratching on her pad. The room seemed hotter than ever.

"Well," the Nazi *leutnant* demanded of them, "what have you to say to that?"

Wallaby said, "That guy is nuts. We never saw him before. What the hell would we want digging up a dead monkey?"

The *leutnant's* face purpled with hate. "Address me properly," he sputtered, "and tell the truth!"

"Take a dive in the lake!"

Frothing at the mouth, the *leutnant* was about to strike Wallaby across the face with the back of his hand. Mark Thornley's fist lashed out, caught the German clean on the jaw and knocked him senseless. Instantly the room was in a turmoil, revolvers being drawn, the guards advancing with bayonets, *Kommandant* Buettel bellowing out violent orders. More guards rushed in. The Aussies, roughly handled, were taken out, locked in a small cell.

"You shouldn't have done that," Wallaby told Thornley.

"Why not?"

"I wanted to do it."

"Maybe we'd better tell 'em the truth," Ronny suggested. "We've nothing to lose by it."

"Haven't we? What about that Italian post we wiped out?"

"I don't mean that part of it. I mean about hunting that treasure. We could show 'em the map."

"Where is the cursed map?" Thornley asked.

"Down that blinkin' well," Wal-

laby said, "where I pitched that uniform."

Ronny said, "I'd like to get my hands on that Percival Vivian Bobb guy. He's the cause of it all."

Mark Thornley grinned. "That's no way to talk. We had our little fun with him. Can't you take a joke in return?"

"A joke, eh? Popped off by a Nazi firing squad. What's so funny about that?"

If the intention was to shoot them out of hand, there was no immediate sign of it. They were permitted to remain together, given prison clothing and food. At ten o'clock the next morning they were again brought before *Kommandant* Buettel. The *leutnant* interpreter wasn't present, the girl stenographer doing the translating. The room was crowded with Italian and German soldiers, the latter carrying whips, aching to use them. On the *Kommandant's* littered desk was a small skull used as a paperweight, apparently the skull of a pigmy. The Aussies didn't care for the perennial grin it appeared to direct at them. Damned ominous!

"The *Kommandant* will give you one more chance," the girl said, predatory dark eyes conveying approval of Thornley. "What make you come to Tripoli?"

"Why go over all that again?"

"Why not tell truth? Maybe it go better for you."

"If we told the truth," Thornley smiled, "you wouldn't believe it."

She translated this to Hauptman Buettel who, in turn, gave her some message.

"Very well," she said. "What is the truth?"

"About two months ago when we were in Cairo—" Mark Thornley told her the whole story, leaving out the unnecessary details of the killing of the Tripoli outpost. All three explained their reasons for believing the treasure map to be genuine, told of digging at the spot indicated and finding nothing but the bones of a monkey.

The girl's smile told them they were not being believed. "You will have to tell a better story than that," she said.

"We said you wouldn't believe it," Wallaby groaned. "Nobody in the world would believe guys could be that nutty."

"But it's the truth, just the same," Ronny Brisbane said, his face, eyes and words the very epitome of innocence.

The girl studied him, then relayed their story to the *Kommandant*, trying to keep her face straight. Long before she had finished talking, his small eyes showed sulphurous impatience, his saber scars gradually becoming livid. When she stopped speaking, he appeared bereft of his senses as he smote the desk, making the pigmy skull rattle, as he roared out German oaths.

"*Raus mit dem gottverdammtten Hund!*" he shouted, pointing at the broadly amused Thornley. It was just as well that the big Australian didn't

understand what he was saying.

The Aussies were again locked in their cell, a confined cubicle without a ray of light except that which came in through a small grating in the iron door. It was noxious and stifling, paling the horrors of the Black Hole of Calcutta into insignificance.

"What d'you suppose old pig-face said to me," Thornley mused, pig-face meaning the *Kommandant*.

"Why he was ordering a dozen bottles of beer for you, and some cold pheasant," Wallaby said.

Their levity was forced, the conversation stilted, all three waiting for the sound of marching men, the Nazi guard that would goose-step them into extinction.

It didn't come, however. Much to their surprise and suspicion they were given better quarters the following day, put to work in the compound supervising the loading of convoys, and supplied with the prison ration of food and cigarettes. It seemed too good to be true, for although the work was hard and long—fourteen to sixteen hours a day—it afforded them opportunities for a planned escape.

Indeed they had actually decided on a break for it, awaiting darkness to put it into effect, when the sudden leniency to them was explained. They were marching to work after an evening meal of weak coffee with neither milk nor sugar, and a small bowl of stew containing a little Italian bully beef, macaroni and sauerkraut, when the dark-haired girl stenographer whispered to Thornley.

"Don't try escape. They give you plenty opportunity—then shoot you in back."

So that was it! Another phase of the Nazis' new order! Undoubtedly they were expert at that sort of thing, by which method they could get rid of prisoners without British retaliation on their own.

There were over 300 British prisoners in the Derg-Gadamas concentration camp, all very weak, many suffering digestive disturbances. They were not permitted to go on sick report unless practically at death's door, because the German and Italian officers in charge had to provide so many laborers daily. At night, when the British were air-raiding, prisoners were forbidden to go out with lighted cigarettes under penalty of being instantly shot.

The Aussies had already provided themselves with some ration sacks containing what food they could save, secretly hidden for the moment of their dash for freedom. But now the whispered warning to them had altered their plans.

One evening following a terrific attack on Tripoli by the R.A.F. from North African bases, an exciting thing occurred right over the concentration camp. Evidently German night-fighters, specially trained, had closed with the homeward bound four-motored Boeing Flying Fortresses. A lively and spectacular battle took place. Two Axis planes—Ronny Brisbane thought they were Heinkels

—were shot down, one of them blazing furiously just outside the barbed wire.

And then it happened!

A British bomber, on fire in her tail, came down like a fiery thunderbolt, crashing into the prison kitchen and toppling over against the east end of the main prison building.

A veritable inferno took place. Quite evidently the Stirling bomber hadn't unloaded all her bombs. Two of them burst with obliterating energy and appalling results, knocking men to the ground hundreds of yards away. Instantly the concentration camp was utterly demoralized.

"Grab the ration sacks!" Thornley ordered. "Pretend to be lending a hand—but meet me where we agreed."

He was gone down the corridor into the shambles of the wrecked and burning prison building, the whole world smelling of gasoline and the fumes of burning oil and high explosive. Reaching the *Kommandant's* office, he searched the place in the glare of the outside flames, ripping out desk drawers and feeling inside them. His big hand closed on what he wanted. A Luger pistol and some shells.

A new gas explosion outside flooded the office with lurid light. Hauptman Buettel was lying on the floor, lifting himself up on one elbow. His little porcine eyes lanced into Thornley as he yanked a revolver from his belt. Thornley fired first, the bullet drilling a hole in the German's head just above the ear.

The prison corridor was a bedlam

of shouting, screaming men clamoring to be released, their exhortations intermingled with hoarse orders in German and Italian as cell doors nearest the blaze were being opened. Outlined against the night, a huge Nazi guard stood in the entrance, rifle at the ready. Thornley knocked him cold with the butt of his Luger, stepped over his body, ran out. The air battle still continued up above.

In the confusion he joined Morton and Brisbane. They had two ration sacks with them, and an extra revolver picked up from an Italian officer blown to pieces by a bomb explosion. Crawling under the wire they walked many miles that first night, aiming for a point in the desert where they knew there were hills, and in the hope of water. With them they had a rough map of North Africa torn from a copy of the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*. They figured on navigating by the stars and sun.

In addition to the Luger and a pocketful of bullets, Mark Thornley had a round object with him, wrapped in paper, looking like a bomb. He placed it in one of the ration sacks.

By morning they were in the midst of rocks and wilderness, arid of vegetation and signs of water, but at least not the place where Axis troops operated. They proceeded with the utmost fatigue and caution, scanning the horizon for the slightest sign of enemy movement, lying flat on the sand whenever a German or Fascist plane could be heard. For the time being

they were safe, but the prospect was not re-assuring. They were confronted, they knew, with hundreds of miles of the great Sand Sea, the dry valleys of the Western Desert, where the odds were a thousand to one against a man's survival.

They rationed themselves rigidly on what little food and water they had, conserving the latter by holding a piece of water-saturated rag in their mouths until it became as dry as their tongues.

Traveling mostly at night, their great worry was to fail in their navigation and find themselves lost. They kept going in a southeast direction, aiming for Zelka or Makrun, both of which places they must strictly avoid, since they were occupied by Axis troops.

They began each day's journey at half-past three in the morning, when, owing to the extremes of the North African climate, it was too cold to sleep. They walked doggedly until around eleven in the morning, at which hour utter weariness in the heat of the day forced them to halt.

They knew that there was a British armored column thrust toward Augila and the Gialo Oasis, how successful it had been they had no way of telling. At any rate it was an objective, and a hope. But now Ronny Brisbane's strength began to give out, his feet swollen and bleeding, his face puffed, lips twice their size, eyes bloodshot. Nothing angelic-looking about him now!

Quite suddenly he pitched forward, trying to excuse his weakness in these

words: "All right, you birds. I'm going to give myself ten minutes' rest. You go ahead. I'll catch up with you later."

They knew very well what he meant. He didn't want to be a further burden to them, first Mark Thornley and then Les Morton having had to give him a helping hand.

Since Ronny refused to let them carry him, there was nothing to do except flop down beside him and rest. Thornley moistened the piece of rag with their last drop of water, put it between Ronny's blistered lips.

They had passed Makrun by dead reckoning, and now, after several hours' rest, they plodded on in a northeast direction, well to the south of the Angila-Murzuch Road. The last of their food had long since gone, and they sucked what little grease they could find in the chambers of their revolvers. Thornley still carried the bomb-like object he had with him, wrapped in old newspaper.

Then, one moonlit night, all of them now acting like drunken men, they staggered to the top of a great sand dune to find themselves staring at three armored cars down below. A voice challenged them in English. A solitary warning shot was fired. Then an English captain began questioning them, learned that they were Australians, and explained that he was in command of a patrol that had penetrated far beyond the main column.

"Brother," Wallaby told him faintly, "you ain't penetrated no place yet. We just penetrated all the way to Tripoli and back." And with this

typical crack at officialdom he pitched face-forward in the burning sands . . .

It was ten days later. At Sidi Omar, Air Vice-Marshal Sir Ffoillet Trotter, K.C.B., D.S.O., was delivering himself of the customary lecture on discipline. Three Aussies stood in front of him.

" . . . not only did all of you leave your posts without permission, giving every appearance of desertion, but you took with you a valuable Fiat G-50 which you had captured, only to return it to the enemy—"

"I set fire to it," Ronny said.

"Furthermore," the Air Vice-Marshal continued severely, "all three of you have been A.W.O.L. for exactly thirty-one days. However," he suddenly smiled, "in consideration of the information you have brought back with you, the general condition of Tripoli as you report it, the location of the German Military Headquarters, and the residence of General Staesi of the Italian Forces—your punishment will take the form of being commissioned Flight-lieutenants in the A.R.A.F."

"No promotion," they said in unison.

The little Air Vice-Marshal's gray eyes were full of admiration for them. "Then permit me the honor of shaking each of you by the hand, before we drink each other's health in a bottle of chilled champagne I have managed to wangle for the occasion."

"Say," Wallaby told him, a broad

grin on his kangaroo face, "for an Air Marshal you're a pretty swell guy!"

In Cairo the following morning, Captain Percy Bobb, liaison officer attached to British Headquarters, received a cardboard box containing what seemed to be a bomb tied up in an old Italian newspaper. Captain Bobb's examination of it was cautious as he gingerly unwrapped it. The bomb proved to be a small human skull. There was a note stuck in its grinning mouth.

Dear Percy:

You certainly put one over on us, which automatically makes you a member of the gang. We felt sorry for poor Popo being left back there in enemy territory. So we brought his napper back with us, and hereby present it to you. You claimed on his casket that he was almost human. By the shape of his skull, he appears to be some distant relative of yours.

Thornley, Morton, Brisbane,
Special Squadron 13, A.R.A.F.

As Captain Bobb studied the skull, his interest absorbed in it because of its perfect shape and small size, three Beaufighters took off from the Sidi Omar flying field to "have a bit of fun" over the Axis-held port of Bengazi.

They left the ground simultaneously, in a perfect triangle formation, then suddenly sky-rocketed into the air as though they had been shot from some gigantic ground-gun.

A Greek soldier said, "Dere go doze nutz Aussies!" The Greek had the right word for it!

Famous Military Corps

3. THE IRONSIDES

The year was 1642. In England a civil conflict was raging between King Charles I and Parliament. Most of the nobility and landed gentry were with the King, and Parliament had the support of the working classes and trades people.

The preliminary struggles and clashes between the contending forces culminating in the Battle of Edgehill, October 1642, seemed to point towards an easy triumph for the Monarchy. The Royal cavalry was composed of the hard-riding cavaliers. Led by Prince Rupert, they rode over the Commonwealth Horse whenever given the opportunity. The Royal infantry, mostly mercenaries trained in the religious wars in Germany, also outclassed any infantry brought against them. The only asset the Parliamentary troops possessed was a burning fanaticism.

In the army of Parliament there was a troop commander named Oliver Cromwell. He saw that the Commons must completely rebuild their forces if the people were to triumph.

Obtaining leave for his troop of sixty men and for himself, he left for the Eastern counties where the feeling against the King was intense. At Cambridge, he began to recruit and drill his men, instilling in them his own fiery spirit.

This was the beginning of a formi-

dable and curious army. The gambling, drinking and wenching that always went with ordinary troops were completely absent. Off duty, all rank was cast aside, but an iron discipline when on duty gradually built up the invincible regiment of cavalry known to history as the "Ironsides."

By May 1643, Cromwell had twelve troops and he determined to test them at Grantham, where they won over twice their number. The regiment rejoined the Commonwealth forces. At Marston Moor, Cromwell led one of the cavalry wings for Parliament. The other wing, composed of the old troops of Parliament, was driven from the field by the Royalists led by Rupert who, instead of holding his men in hand, scattered them to pursue. It was another story elsewhere. Cromwell's regiment struck like a thunderbolt and scattered the Royal Horse opposed to them. Holding his men in hand, he charged Charles' infantry and before Rupert returned from his futile pursuit the Royal army had been thoroughly beaten.

The following months saw the entire army of Parliament reorganized on the same footing as the Ironsides. Re-named the New Model, it ground to pieces the Royal force at Naseby in 1645 and the triumph of the people was assured.

by HOWARD R. VOIGHT

Sharp Trader

by

BRIAN O'BRIEN

Graciously, Señor Barata gave the starving natives their choice—they could trade on his terms or die of hunger.



SEÑOR MANUEL BARATA lolled at supper on the verandah of the bark hut the Fang villagers had built him. His face, black with stubble from throat to dark, limpid eyes, was puffy and damp. Oily hair tumbled over his forehead. He wore a sweaty, collarless shirt and filthy trousers tucked into gumboots. He pretended not to see the natives standing in the pelting rain at the foot of the verandah steps.

"Food, *n'tangan*," an old woman moaned.

Daintily, Barata speared a sardine with the point of his knife, examined

it elaborately and popped it into his mouth.

"Food, lord," a soft voice pleaded. "We hunger."

Barata turned languidly to inspect the village chief. M'bene was a tall, young man, his beard not yet formed. The chief's staff he bore was new. His face was thin and rain cascaded down his slim, muscular body and soaked the scrap of bark cloth he wore about his waist.

"So you hunger," Barata said indifferently. "Why do you hunger when you can buy food from me?"

"You will not see our rubber. You will not take our trade-money." M'bene held up a bundle of tiny arrowheads, forged from meteorite iron by the village smith.

"You have also ivory."

"The *n'tangan* knows," M'bene said patiently, "that we may not trade our town ivory. Without the teeth to back its value our trade-money is worthless."

"That is no palaver of mine," Barata said. "You hunger. *Bueno*. I have food. Bring the ivory, I will give you food."

"Trade," urged an elder. "Can the people eat ivory?"

Barata turned his back to hide a grin. Soon they would break and he would be well paid for his waiting. For a year, down in Benito on the Spanish Guinea coast, Barata had heard tales of the treasures of ivory held by the remote Fang towns. Those were the towns who, without any coaching from the whites, had perfected a crude currency which, backed by the ivory, was honored in trade all through the Big Bush. So Barata had hired carriers to guide him through the baffling trails of the rain forest to M'bene's town, many days from the coast.

M'bene had proudly shown him the ivory; twenty massive tusks, perfect specimens, man high and thigh thick, worth nearly \$20,000 American in Benito. Barata offered them calico cloth, brass rods, beads, all the trader's rubbish he had; canned fish, ship biscuits, everything. But that stubborn young fool, full of impor-

tance as a newly elected chief, refused to trade. But Barata was patient, he stayed in the house they built him, working endlessly to persuade the chief.

He had been there a month when he noticed something. The rains, which should have ceased, still lashed the forest until it was flooded, all trails lost and the village gardens drowned. The Fang people were bewildered and scared. In their lush land, life was a pattern of planting and harvest regular as night and day. But here, suddenly, was no food; even the game had fled to the mountains far to the eastward. They had taken no precautions against such an unheard-of calamity. Barata watched them eat up their slender reserves of palm oil, manioc and yams and rubbed his pudgy hands together. It would not be long. The young men returned from hunting empty-handed. The women grubbed roots from the flooded forest. They ate their precious hunting dogs and, last of all, shot, with little poisoned arrows, the raw-headed vultures, taboo to all bush people, and devoured them in shame. And not until then did the Fang go to Barata to ask him for food in payment for the house they had built him.

He laughed at them and daily watched the children whining languidly, the older people crouched on their palm-rib beds, staring hollow-eyed at the curtain of chill rain that lashed their world so pitilessly. And

now they hung around watching him eat. So much the better; the smell of food might cure their damned stubbornness. He lit a cigarette, ears cocked to catch the low-pitched murmuring in the rain behind him.

"Trade," an elder mumbled urgently.

"Hear me," M'bene said desperately. "Soon the rains must cease. The beasts will return and we can hunt and eat. Better we wait."

"Who knows if the rain will cease. Trade before we die of hunger."

"But if we have no ivory how can we buy things from other towns with our trade money?"

"If we are dead of hunger we can buy nothing," squalled a woman. "Give us food, O chief."

M'bene stuck his staff in the mud.

"Is it the will of all people that I trade our teeth for food?"

"Aye! Trade!"

"O *n'tangan*."

Barata turned and looked down indifferently.

"I would trade one tooth for food for my people."

Barata's fat cheeks quivered indignantly.

"Hear me, fool," he spat. "For two months I sit in this dripping cesspit waiting for you to trade. Now you would trade for one tooth. I will trade for twenty teeth or none!"

"Trade!" The people pushed forward, churning the water to mud about their knees. "Trade! Can we eat ivory?"

"Come," M'bene said dully.

Barata watched them splash into

the darkness and grinned as he made fast a balance to a rafter.

In half an hour they returned, the young men staggering two to each tusk. They hoisted them to the balance and Barata weighed them, showing a pliant cane into the cavities to measure their solidity. Slowly he totalled the weights, calculating busily as the people crowded with noisy eagerness about the steps. Then he stood up.

"How many people have you, O chief?"

"There be seven tens and seven men, five tens and nine women and five tens and three small ones," M'bene said.

"*Bueno!* I will pay for this ivory three biscuits for every man, two biscuits for each woman and one for each child. Also I give five tens of cans of silver fish, ten cans of red fish and ten square cans of meat. I give in addition ten bags of salt and ten heads of tobacco."

"*E ke!*" M'bene stared, stupefied. "That is food for but one eating. That food is less than one-tenth the worth of one tooth!"

"Then take away the teeth," Barata said casually, yawning.

"Aye so!" M'bene snapped.

"Nay!" yelled a young man. "The trade is made."

"Look!" A woman pushed forward, slapping empty breasts. "Shall we die? Shall our children die, with food in this Spanierman's house?"

"Back," M'bene ordered hopelessly. "Take the teeth, Spanierman, and give my people food."

Barata sweated happily, loading a case with sardines, trade salmon, canned meat and ship's biscuit. He passed it down, with salt and tobacco, to the elders who grabbed it and started for the village, the people crowding jealously about them. Barata watched them go, then threw himself gleefully into a chair.

That night thunder crashed above the forest and lightning highlighted the clouded sky. Next morning was brilliant with sunshine in golden pencils through the steam rising from the sodden earth. Barata congratulated himself that he had made the trade before the thunderstorm came to warn the Fang that the rains would soon end. Soon, too, the floods would go down and the trails be open. He splashed through the mud to the village.

M'bene sat on the doorsill of his hut, his face drawn with hunger, staring down at the red mud swirling about his feet. Barata looked about him. There were a few sick-looking women in their huts and their men stared dully.

"Already they hunger again," M'bene said.

"No matter," Barata said briskly. "The rains will stop and you can hunt soon. Hear me, chief. I want four tens and five young men; two for each tooth of ivory and five for my things and a guide to lead me to the coast."

"Wait!" M'bene held up his hand. There was a faint, irregular mumble

far away in the forest. The people crawled out of their huts to listen.

As the muttering ceased, M'bene shouted joyfully.

"O people," he called. "You have heard the talk of the drum. Even now beasts walk in the forest. Soon we shall eat meat. Soon—"

"What about my carriers?" Barata snapped.

"First the young men must hunt for food to give them strength."

"*Basta!* They are strong enough. They had food last—"

"They paid much for that food," M'bene said bitterly.

"When the need is great the price is high," Barata grinned. "Look, chief, already I have wasted too much time in this place. I must go. You will call your young men."

M'bene shook his head, a faint gleam in his dark eyes.

"What?" Barata snapped. "How can I get away without guide and carriers?"

"You cannot," M'bene said. "You would be lost in one day."

"I have fine trade things to pay for guide and carriers," Barata said.

"You have also ivory."

"And if I do not pay?"

"You may stay," M'bene said. "When your food is gone we will sell you more food—for ivory."

"Son of a dog!" Barata screamed.

Two days later he shambled out of the village, following five carriers laden with his goods and one guide, for whose services he had paid twenty tusks of ivory, man high and thigh thick.

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Red Is the Blade

by F. R. BUCKLEY

Further adventures in swordplay and intrigue, as practiced by that swashbuckling rogue, Luigi Caradosso.

TO THE Most Reverend Father in God, my Lord Bishop of Costecaldo: from Luigi Caradosso, sometime Captain of the Guard to His Grace the Duke of Rometia—and still under his protection, mark you—these:

Reverend My Lord:

The fact is, that blazonry doth not stand forth well from black velvet, and least to eyes as old as mine, and in the gloaming. That is why I write, instead of coming to Costecaldo with Your Lordship's inquisitors, to answer these charges of commerce with the devil.

Had I known that these two men were those officers who last week arrested my old friend Bertuccio Bucca for some few idle words, of course I should have welcomed them with open arms; but, weeding my cabbages in the eventide and seeing two sable figures skulking (so to say) about my cottage, I knew no better than to think they were after my fowls.

Let not Your Reverence be alarmed for them, however; they are in good hands; indeed, already one of them hath recovered sufficiently to tell me whereof I stand accused—to wit, alliance with a witch, complicity

in the sale of Andrea Bassano his soul to the devil, and connivance at the said Andrea's disappearance in a clap of thunder.

This is what comes of trying to be sociable with countryfolk in their pot-houses, of striving to take their minds off their base condition and their general likeness to brute beasts. I doubt not that Bertuccio Bucca was doing the like—he that led the right wing at Agnolo!—and they had garbled him into a dungeon.

How much I have been belied Your Lordship shall now judge, starting from the point that (as the Prior shall certify Your Grace) I was brought up, a man of peace, in the convent of San Luca.

It was indeed from the cloister, or the lay-brothers' quarter thereof, that I entered on my military career, as servant to this Andrea Bassano aforesaid—a poor gentleman who, when I met him, was defending his life against four foul fellows with broadswords.

'Twas not so much that I cared whether he lived or died, being then only eighteen years of age myself and less aware of life's value than I am now at eighty; but for long and very long I had yearned to fling vegetables at someone. And, having been marketing for the brethren and having a full basket with me, behold I must stop, fumble and let fly with a turnip, the which smote one of the assassins on the head.

As I had meant, but what followed astonished me.

For the fellow turned from his

proper work of murdering Ser Andrea, uttered an oath which would set fire to Your Lordship's mitre and, sword in hand, came bounding across the cobblestones toward *me*.

I speak of the year 1518, before they widened all the streets at Pontevecchio; this was at the corner of the Via Tornabuoni, where now they have the grand new inn. At that time, there was naught there but a little armorer's shop; whose master, by God's grace, was standing in his doorway at that moment, watching the fight while he burnished the handle of a rapier.

Had he been at his bench instead of thus taking the sunshine, I should have been a blessed angel sixty-two years come next Easter; as it was, I snatched the blade out of his hands and, with no more sword-knowledge than terror could give me in ten heart-beats, I faced this oncoming bravo.

Ah, Ignorance, what a power art thou in this world; greater than thy sister, Malice! For he rushed at me with his point held exactly according to the rules of art, his eyes on mine yet taking in my blade-position—all most proper, I can see him now; and then what must I do but jump aside, swing my rapier as a farmer swings a flail, and cleave the poor clever fellow to the eyebrows!

It was so quick done that I could not credit it, stood gaping at him in his lake of blood, unbelieving he was dead. There were women in the street,

and as I write I hear them—screaming, chattering, but most of them telling me to aid the poor gentleman, go to the rescue, kill again.

None of them chanced to have borne the man I'd just split, but I was not old enow to consider such matters. Nay; pushed from behind by a fat woman with a moustache, I waved my stolen sword, gave a yell and went headlong into the fray.

Other things beside the fat woman were pushing me, Your Reverence; Fate, a certain wild swelling of the heart—ha! I laugh at myself. Luigi Caradosso hewing away in a street brawl! Beardless, garbed as a lay brother—I used to sing in the choir. Ah me!

Well, by this time Messer Andrea had put paid to one of his assailants, but the other twain had moved to take him from two angles. He had his back to a wall, and he was near death. 'Twas only a shout from one bravo, seeing me approach, that saved him, because the other, turning his eye, let his point wander an inch past Andrea's throat. And before he could recover himself I had run him through from side to side till my hilt thumped on his ribs.

Your Lordship will see that of novices I was the most crass. When Messer Andrea, at almost this same moment, gave his man two inches of blade-tip, I thought he had missed his stroke. And was amazed when the fellow dropped his sword, clapped both hands to the wound, choked and fell dead. I was looking at the *colpo di Bentivoglio*—just past the breast-

bone and into the heart, and very beautifully executed too, had I but known it.

Messer Andrea puffed a breath of relief, picked up the dead man's cap, wiped his sword on it and smiled at me.

At which same moment, a hoarse voice in mine ear demanded who was to pay for the rapier. The city watch had come at last—too late, as ever—and my old armorer, horn glasses askew on his nose, was calling on the sergeant to arrest me for theft.

"Taxes such as I pay!" he kept shouting. "Fifty years I've been in business, and may not stand in mine own door—"

I had been robbed too, it seemed. Eager for my life, I had dropped my great basket; the vegetables had been scattered and trampled, whereas of the fruits that could be eaten out of hand Your Grace may imagine the urchins had left but few. And we had a sub-prior, God rest him—well—

The watch-sergeant was turning the dead bravos over with his foot.

"Giuseppe Borgo," says he of the one I'd spitted. And clicked his tongue. "Dodged the rope after all."

"Piero Adelanti over by the shop, Sergeant," says one of the men.

"Is't indeed?" says the officer, looked at Messer Andrea and touched his helmet. He did not salute because, though noble dressed, the young man was notably shabby. I have made the same distinction myself. "These be old friends of ours, messire. 'St been gambling, eh?"

"They had coggèd dice," says Andrea.

"Well, of course," says the sergeant, reasonably. "Your Worship must be from the country."

Andrea flushed and became very obviously the gentleman, for all his plume was broke-backed.

"I come from two years at the Court of Naples," says he in a certain voice, "and if there is to be an inquisition—"

"God forbid!" says the sergeant. "But—"

"—I may be found at my late father's house at Rimaldo by Cartresa, which I go to inherit. Furthermore, I will not be bothered for a month, because I go to be married. Andrea Bassano is my name. Is that enough?"

The sergeant did salute now, and gave a humble grin.

"Your Excellency would be dicing for some little gift for the lady, no doubt—"

"Is that thine affair?" Andrea was beginning, when the old armorer came to the fore again.

"What of my sword?" he demanded. "My good sword, all to be re-scoured, and the engraving chip-ped, as like as not—"

I said naught, but I considered—what of my home, now? Our sub-prior—they had never been able to teach me to sing from music, and now I had done two slayings and lost the vegetables—

It may certify Your Grace what manner of man was Andrea Bassano that with a smile and two gestures he satisfied everyone.

First he tugged the sword from its red sheath in that bravo; squinted at it, and flung the old armorer a price that made him bow.

Then he handed the blade to me and smiled at all around us.

And then he put his arm about my shoulders, patted his hand and said: "Come with me, boy."

II

It appeared, as we rode thence (for my new master talked to me almost like an equal) that yon sergeant of the watch had guessed well.

Andrea's father, born to a wasted estate in the Sign of the Crab, had spent his life living up to his nativity, sending the very sons of his body to far courts to save the expense of maintaining 'em.

Hence this eldest (none of the others ever came back) was agog to return to his home in splendor, especially on account of his betrothed, Elisabetta. Her family was even poorer than his; indeed, orphaned, she had had to go live at his home. And he had had visions of taking her some piece of goldsmithery or a jewel; that was why he had gambled in Pontevocchio. Now he had bethought him that to have an armed servant would suffice, whence his spending of his last *scudi* on that sword and the horse he had bought for me.

I had heard love scorned such fripperies, but he laughed and said I had not been to court.

"Hath the Madonna Elisabetta?" I

asked, upon which he became grave and said no, thank God.

"Her court hath been her parents and mine, and since they died her old nurse that wanted to be an actor."

"An actor?" says I. "Like a man?"

"Even so. One of the village girls, but all she became was wet nurse to my lady. Whom therefore she hath kept from all knowledge of the world—a very dragon."

I could not follow these wherefores at that age, ha ha! So we rode on in silence for some yards.

"But the girl lives not who'd not rather have a man come prancing than walking," says Andrea, and I could tell he'd had the proverb from someone else. "Here's a flat piece by the roadside, Luigi; we'll have a lesson of fence."

So there under a mulberry tree in the bright sunlight he gave me my first lesson in the trade I was to ply so long—taught me that *colpo di Benvoglio*, first ever I knew that had a name to it. And to think that for forty years one of the best has been named after me—the cut at the neck vein, just above the gorget. Your Reverence may know; it hath figured in many confessions.

Once, after the battle of Ostense it was, I rode past that tree again, and Bertuccio Bucca (the same Your Lordship has in the dungeon) wondered why I halted the troop and crossed myself. Ah me!

Well, to return; we jogged on northward, out of the heat and into the springtime, my master looking past all the flowering trees and the

birds that were building nests therein, to a future when he should have replaced his family among the great ones of the countryside.

"There is a fall of water at Rimaldo," says he one day. "I used to sit above it all day with Madonna Elisabetta when we were children, and watch trouts; she would never catch them, being too tender-hearted. I could build a mill there, take all the grain from the peasants about—'tis just a question of money to start. Then I have other plans, but oons! how to—What's this?"

Aye, just so it happened. Those are the very words he was saying, Your Reverence, when, like an evil star coming over the threshold of the night, there showed over a little hill ahead of us the gleam of a golden helmet.

And as we reined in and backed our horses to the grass at the side of the road—it was just by a little bridge—there topped the rise first a captain in half-armor; then a lieutenant and a sergeant riding just behind him; then a horse with no rider; but with armor slung across its saddle; then the files of a most black-avised cavalry troop.

We watched them coming over the little hill till their leader was abreast of us, at which point he raised his arm. Beautifully disciplined they were, as I know now; they stopped where their feet fell.

"'Morrow!" says the captain to my master, and smiled.

I have known a great many smilers in my time, Your Grace; I have seen men grin for lordship, for love, for terror; but never have I known one whose chops could drip such good will as those of Gianni Mola. Yes, it was he, though we knew it not; the same which had "The Enemy of Mercy" engraved on his breastplate—the motto was before us then, but so hidden among all sorts of masks and scrolls and flying Cupids that we could not see it.

Whereas that smile, with the snag-teeth, the twinkling blue eyes and the red nose in the middle of it, outshone the very sun.

If I have since said its owner was the devil—

"Your stream?" asks Gianni, waving his thumb at the rivulet under the bridge.

"Nay," says my master. "I'm but a poor country fellow on a journey. To Rimaldo."

"Ah, so?" says Gianni; raised his arm again and swung it toward the brook. In an instant, the troop was dismounted and leading its horses to the water.

I will tell Your Lordship now, since this is in some sense a confession, that they were the remains of that Spanish troop which had served Cesare Borgia—the widow-makers, they called themselves. This I did not know at the time, nor did I learn till long after what happened to the widows they had made. I sat there admiring their discipline and the sheen of their armor and the beauty of their mounts.

Gianni Mola took off his gold helm, swung from his horse, left it to a man who appeared at his stirrup and crossed the dusty road to us, still smiling.

"Lands about here, ha?" says he to my master in his deep voice. "Noble of these parts? Fine horse."

"He might drink," says Andrea, dismounting in his turn. "Luigi—"

I led the horses upstream, to the bank near the last man of the *condotta*. He was a squat fellow, I remember, almost as dark as a Moor; he squinted, moreover, and his hands were covered with warts. He looked at me, craned his neck to see my master talking with Gianni Mola, said something in Spanish, at which his fellows laughed, and then came leering close to me.

He smelled very ill, and I shrank from him.

"Cartresa, eh?" he said, jerking at me with his finger. "Yes, Cartresa?"

Cartresa was a town nearby, I knew, but no concern of mine, so I shook my head.

The man leered more than ever.

"Yes, Cartresa!" says he, and was making gestures as of one who cuts his throat, when I heard my master calling me. I gave the leering man the bridles of the horses and hurried to the bridge, glad to get away.

Andrea was in thick converse with Gianni, but looking doubtful.

"'Tis at thy choice," Mola was saying, "but devil fry me if I can imagine a young fellow refusing—a

week's holiday, and home with fame and a pocketful of gold! But none ever offered to make *me* a lieutenant; nay, *my* commission had to be carved on my old hide."

Andrea's eyes wandered to the riderless horse and the armor thereon. They were very fine.

"And thou *art* commissioned—" says he.

"By the count? I'm hired, horse and man, and the guns I've got at Cartresa. Though to bring that town back to its senses is a duty, almost. Think on't—to revolt when his poor lordship is in a French prison."

"Ha?" says Andrea, and the captain's face changed.

"'Twas for his ransom he asked some few trifling taxes, which now I strive to collect for him. Is not his town his town?"

"But 'tis reduced already!" says Andrea, irresolute.

"As I say!" beams Mola. "Simply, there be contumacious rebels a couple score—the council and such ringleaders—cooped up in the citadel. But we'll have them out in no time, and—"

"If I go, Luigi must ride to Rimaldo," says Andrea, his eyes still on the horse and armor. "I—am expected."

"Well—" says Mola, and his eyes flickered; then he smiled again. "Well, so be it. But we can't wait for him. Let him rejoin thee at Cartresa, bringing back a mule for the plunder. Ha! I say plunder—ye know what I mean."

"Goods lying in the streets. Free

for any. I could not have believed it."

"Free as air! Come and see. I was in Cartresa two days ago—just a little sally into the country, this is—and the rebels had run like rats, save for these graybeards in the old tower. Well, shall not an honest lad profit by what's forfeit anyhow? 'Tis for the lady's sake."

"She hath not much taste for gauds," says Andrea. The words spurted from him; he seemed surprised at them himself.

"Ah, but hast thou no taste for taking 'em to her?" smiles Gianni. "Wouldst not rather ride up in panoply, with this lad as squire—we can find him a suit of plate, I'll be bound—than trollop up with that feather waggling?"

We had esteemed ourselves quite a gallant pair, just half an hour ago. Now my master smiled unsurely.

"Luigi—" says he.

"There!" cries Gianni Mola clapping his hands. "I knew it! Tell me not I know not spirit from clay!"

"Thou knowest the way to my—my house," says Andrea; which indeed I did, having heard every inch on't described many times as we rode. "Hasten there, see Madonna Elisabetta—"

"And tell her the master will be home in a week, with a bale o'clock o'gold," says Mola. "Eh?"

"So," says Andrea. "And then join me at Cartresa."

"He should be there and back in two days," says the captain, "unless he dawdles."

Meseemed there was a strange flash in his blue eyes as he said that last word. If, sixty years later, I have told yokels I then saw hell-fire—well, Your Reverence is to judge.

There was but a moment of it; the eyes were smiling again as Gianni clapped my master on the back and shouted for a man to bring a little keg of wine.

They offered me none, but I saw them drinking together as I breasted the rise of the hill. . . .

III

Sir, that is all there was in the nature of a sale, of my master's soul or of any other commodity.

Not until I had ridden some miles toward the witchcraft and the clap of thunder also charged against me, did I begin to suspect that we had been dealing with the devil.

At a bend of the road just before a village—I could see the church-tower—there was a great flowering tree, very pretty against the blue sky; and, being young, I reined in for a moment to admire it.

There were birds twittering about, and a little warm breeze that made the grass fragrant, and if I was not thanking God for my youth I ought to have been, when below the tree's cloud of blossom I perceived the bare feet of a man. In mid-air. Toeing in after the fashion of the hanged. And as I rode forward a little the rest of him came into view—a poor peasant fellow, his face purple, his eyes bulg-

ing and his poor hard hands forever limp against his thighs.

The breeze moved the branches and a shower of petals came down, Your Reverence, and in the midst of it—he started to spin. At the which my horse must have taken fright, because the next I remember is halting in the village.

Halting where the village had been, I should say, for it was there no longer. The roofs were off the houses—one does it with a grapnel and six horses, my lord, as I was to learn later; the windows were driven in; the doors, piled in the middle of the street, had burned until now they smoked just about as much as cottage chimneys at the time of the midday meal.

Only the church remained, and here was the parish priest without his hat, tottering from one to another of his parishioners as they lay strewn in the dust.

I asked him what had befallen, but I knew. I knew! Better than he could tell me; because though he spoke very calm and reasonably, he seemed in some sort to be asleep.

"There have been soldiers here, my son," says he. "A captain in a gold helm. Yes. Wanted money and—these—could not pay. Gianni Mola—"

He raised one arm toward the stricken village, like a scarecrow; gave a terrible cry:

"My flock! My little lambs!"

And sank down in the road and wept. I dismounted, but he would none of me; just lay there, his hands

over his old face, moaning for those he'd baptised and wed and suchlike. So at last I rode on.

Now I looked my first on the face of war; that I was to know so much better, Heaven help me, than my mother's.

The first I saw was a square of ashes, where a hut had been; the Goodman was hanging from one of his fruit-trees and some soldier had amused himself by sticking a lance through his pig. It lay in the middle of the road, and my horse shied at the smell of blood.

So did I.

Think of that!

There were other squares of ashes, and other dead men, and patches of feathers where heroes had plucked the dead men's fowls before carrying 'em off; and once I saw two women in a ditch, and would have spoken with them, but they screamed at me and then slobbered.

When at last I stopped to drink—for my mouth was very parched—my face in the water of the pool looked ten years older than I remembered it; indeed, I was young no more.

Despite which, I felt somewhat less than a man as I rode up to the manor-house of Rinaldo. It seemed impossible that the master of yon low-built, old-fashioned place should be off in the train of a murderer, a robber and a bandit, but, possible or not, 'twas not imaginable that I should bring the news to this lady Elisabetta. On

the other hand—at the monastery, the brethren had been very strict about the truth—I had to halt there in sight of the house and think for quite a long time about an acceptable lie. And at the end, the best I could invent was a small attack of fever that had laid Andrea low for a day or so.

When I came into the lady's presence, even this poor tale hurt me in the telling, because she was, as it were, of a soft body; not armored against cruel news. I made the fever as little as ever I could, and blushed and stammered until she must have thought I had a touch thereof myself. But 'twas evident she loved my master some distance the other side of idolatry, and, as I say—

Not that she was beautiful, my lord; nor even pretty. She had kind eyes, though; a little woman.

"I'll go to him," says she. "Maria—"

An old hag came shuffling into the room; I wondered if this could be she that had wanted to be an actor, and as the lady turned, I caught the bel-dame's eye and shook my head. And winked.

Behold the witch of whom I stand accused!

At once she comprehended all seven deadly sins and was full on my side. I have aye found those we call wicked to be very quick of comprehension, and have sometimes wondered why.

"Maria—" says the lady, all agitation. But the old dame would not hear her.

"Messer Andrea's ill, and you'd ride to cure him," says she, shaking a skinny claw. "Nay, I can still find a crack to listen at when there's a young man with your Ladyship, hee hee! Well, you'll not go with my good will, or at all, with Gianni Mola about the countryside!"

"Mention not that name in this house! And I will go!" says Elisabetta, stamping her foot.

"Indeed, lady—" I began, and she listened to me. Had I not come from Andrea?

"His Worship," says I, "is—hath—that is to say—"

"He hath a good leech, is on the mend, and would fret himself to flinders were my lady to wander the countryside for him. Eh?" says the old woman, winking to show she believed not a word of it.

I nodded, sweating.

"There!" says the duenna; and Elisabetta looked at me, undecided, tapping her foot.

"If Your Ladyship would write a letter," says I, "saying that he will be welcome home—"

Her face lighted up. She was one of those women who must be doing something, giving their hearts' blood, for choice.

"I will. Maria, pens and ink. Take this young man to the kitchen. Feed him well; he must start back tomorrow morning early."

"Tonight, an't please you," says I. Because, Your Reverence, I thought the less time my master had with Gianni Mola, the better, and also I had lost my taste for—scenery.

"Thou'rt a good servant," says Elisabetta. "Feed him well and *quickly*, Maria!"

Downstairs, the old woman gave me enough provender for a corporal's guard, and then froze my appetite by asking questions. It was her belief that Andrea had stopped by the wayside for some girl; and of this, with some talk about youth and wild oats, she did not disapprove. Only wanted to know whether the lady was dark or fair and all else about her, I stuffing myself with food as well as might be and holding grimly to my tale about the fever.

Such a pair of eyes as she fixed on me from t'other side of the table! Like red-hot gimlets.

"Might as well speak," says she. "All my care is to save her ladyship woe—'a's had enough lately, poor dove, with her cousin, God rest him, gone along of this Gianni Mola."

I could not help it; my mouth flew open and I felt myself go pale. Then I saw the blacks of that old witch's eyes widen; she half rose and a hand of bone gripped my wrist.

"'A God's name, young man," she croaked, "tell me not that he's—that Messer Andrea, *he* hath not listened—"

Mercifully, at that instant the lady's bell rang above-stairs; I wrenched myself loose and appeared before her, panting. She must have wondered at my disorder. Maria was still lumbering up the stair. It was dusk by this time, and the lady had a candle on her table, but she had not yet sealed the letter—sat there with it

in her hand and smiled up at me.

"Luigi," she said, "I am to put something herein, which the winds might waft away were it opened. So I will read thee what is written. 'Good my lord—'"

"Lady—" I began, indignant that she should think me an ordinary servant.

"'Good my lord, recover well and come quickly to me. Meanwhile dream of the woods and the jays in their great disputes and troubles and the stream dashing over the fall, and 'See, a fish, Andrea!'"' That is all."

I was to be indignant still, but she kissed the words she had written; then sealed them up.

"Tell him of that," says she, handing me the billet. "And God speed thee, Luigi Caradosso."

IV

I was ruthless in escaping from the claws of old Maria, for what could she do (I asked myself) save mop and mow?

And I answered myself; nothing. And rode so desperately forward in mine own conceit, that I missed the Cartresa road as often as I took it; 'twas evening again when I reached the gates of the city.

Since it lay conquered, these were open, but there was a double guard which examined me most strictly.

"Andrea Bassano? Why, that's the new—"

"The new lieutenant," says a sergeant.

"Quite so; the new lieutenant," says the officer, laughing. "And this is the new lieutenant's new servant, eh? Thy master's in the Palazzo Testoni, boy—at supper about now, I should think. Go hand his cup for him; he'll need it."

They all chuckled as I rode through the archway, and I thought perhaps they had given me wrong directions. But no; I reached the Palazzo Testoni through the streets that seemed little damaged by the siege, considering; and there was Andrea, sure enough, sitting at a long table on the *piano nobile*, with perhaps a score of other officers, mostly bearded. There were three or four young men like my master, lacking whiskers and looking sad as moulted birds; but they sat mumchance at the foot of the table, whereas Andrea was well above the salt.

Gianni Mola was at the head of the board, half drunk. And how changed now was his geniality in mine eyes—in Andrea's too, methought; he looked pale and ill at ease.

"Ha! Baby's baby!" shouts Gianni at sight of me. "Hast brought a letter from mama?"

All at the table roared, save the beardless young officers, who grinned without mirth. My poor master flushed sudden scarlet, stared daggers at me—as though I'd be fool enow to hand him the billet in such company—and in growling wise bade me bring him wine.

"And quickly!" says he that was always so kind. "Thou'st dawdled enough by the way."

Gianni Mola, elbows on the table, stared at him with the devil's own twinkle in his eye.

"As I was explaining," says he, "if the lieutenant can now take time from his love affairs—"

All but the sad young officers roared again.

"—there *is* a small work to be accomplished before we can take our repose. Certain wool-faced dodderers calling 'emselfs a council, or some such, have holed up in this citadel, with the city guard to make things awkward; and to put the matter plain, you, Ser Andrea, must get 'em out."

He rolled his glittering eyes around the table.

"These—wolves—have tried," says he, "and failed. Low blood's their trouble. Which of you all is a gentleman?"

There was silence, during which they looked at the table. Meseemed that through the beards I could see mouth-corners twitching; the young officers' lips just drooped.

"But I did not come to fight old men," says Andrea.

"Just for the loot, eh?" says Gianni Mola, and again the company roared. "Or is't that city guard that makes thee tender?"

Andrea got up, and I saw that the serving man standing behind him moved closer.

"If ye think I'm afraid—" His face was white.

"Nay, nay!" says Gianni. "And to prove it—I've a company of my best men, that served under Gabriel Perez,

God rest him, ready for the assault tomorrow dawn. With a gentleman to follow, they'll make a flea-bite of yon citadel. We've blown the gate in."

He got up and clapped Andrea on the shoulder. The others rose, too. It was the end of supper.

"Thy girl shall be proud of thee," says Gianni in a low voice. "And see—knowing thy family, who knows but these burghers may not surrender at discretion?"

Andrea did not see, as I did, how he looked at the nearest officer and winked heavily.

"Now read thy love letter and sleep well. Come, children, we'll make a little patrol."

They went out, laughing among themselves and shepherding the sad young officers before them; and when they were in the street I heard another roar of merriment.

Andrea stretched out his hand for the letter. "Sir—" says I.

He clicked his fingers.

"I know," he said. "I know. What did *she* say?"

"I—I told her Your Worship had a fever. I thought—"

He took the letter.

"That was well done," says he heavily. "And no lie. Fever—"

"Sir," I said, "if it may be pardoned; could we not ride—"

Andrea gave a short laugh.

Says he, "I am no coward."

"The brethren used to say that to flee evil was no shame," says I.

He shook his head, broke the seal, read the letter twice or thrice over, judging by the time he took. Then he crumpled it all together and held it in his hand and went over to the window. It was dark outside by now—a blue night without stars, but with a red glow cast across its sky by houses that were still burning, somewhere the other side of the town. Against this glow there stood forth the citadel, with its pointed tower and braziers burning on the battlements.

Your Reverence will recall what the girl had said in that letter—"the jays in their great disputes and troubles, and the stream dashing over the fall—"

It was a far cry . . .

"Luigi!" says my master suddenly.

"Aye, sir?"

"Wake me at dawn."

V

I thought, there would be little sleep for him that night; there was none for me, quartered in a rheumy cellar with other officers' servants, mostly drunk. There was a torch sconced to one great pillar, and in its flare men gambled and cursed, all except one who sat on his pallet, hands around knees, waiting for the noise to cease. He was an old man, as I thought then—forty or so. He beckoned me over to him.

"Going with the master?" says he; meaning, to the attack. I said aye.

"Keep behind 'em," says he in a

low voice. "Look, boy. These troops thy master's to lead are the same that ran away a week ago; this assault is their punishment. Tell thy master—lead 'em from behind."

"If they run again—" I began, but he laughed.

"They'll not dare run. See. Citadel's *here*; storming party must go up the market-square *here*—eh? Very well; Gianni will have cavalry in the side-streets and behind 'em, and guns to fire into their flanks if they retreat. Hark! There they go now."

From the street above our heads came indeed the sound of grinding wheels, the slow clop of hoofs, the cursing—

"There'll be but one safe place for your detachment—inside the citadel. And they'll care naught whose body they trample to get there. Tell thy master. He's green."

"Then why doth Gianni Mola give him such command?"

The old fellow looked at me.

"Nay," says he, staring at the groined vault. "As for *that*—"

He would say no more. Even when I asked him, had those sad young officers been tried in high emprise and found wanting?—he was mum but for a chuckle.

My mind fumbled in a fog of puzzlement for two or three hours, until at last a finger of light came through the cellar-grating. I have not said it, I perceive, but the night before, a sergeant had issued me my armor, the first ever I wore; a sallet with a dent in it, and a hooked stomacher that laced behind.

"Good as new, too," he'd said. "Fellow that wore 'em got shot in the throat."

As I buckled myself in, the street was resounding with the tramp of infantry and the sharper sound of horsemen at the walk. Going upstairs to Andrea's quarters, I paused at a landing and looked out—the foot was our storming party going into position, guarded by cavalry, and hangdog and sullen as a convoy of condemned.

The guns that were to hold us to our duty, I could not see, but the lifting mist showed the citadel grimmer than it had loomed the night before. Its fires were out; it squatted there, with the smashed gate of its enceinte-wall gaping, like some old monster wounded not quite to death.

So did it fascinate me that I stood staring until Andrea's very hand fell on my shoulder, and I spun round to find him half-armored and trying to smile. At the head of the stairway stood two of the bearded officers, looking down on us and smiling without effort.

"Sir," says I, but he hushed me.

"Thou'rt late, Luigi. These gentlemen have been my tiring-maids. Go thou and polish the rest of my plate."

He started down the stairs, but I followed him.

"Under favor—"

"Go back!" says Andrea, through his teeth. "Go back, fool!"

He was in no mood for argument, wherefore I kept at his heels without

further protest. When we reached the square, I did try to tell him what the man had said about leading the assault from the rear; but, Reverend Sir, he was past listening. I think perhaps he was hearing those jays at their quarrels in the home woods, or the dash of that trout-brook over the weir.

At all events, 'twas at the head of the company he posted himself, and I took position behind him, hoping to form some kind of cushion for his body, perhaps.

Our front-rank men, I saw, glancing back, had ugly-looking hatchets to their hands, and they themselves looked uglier still. As for the cavalry, it was indeed drawn up in the side-streets, on either side of the path we must take to that damned gate. And at the head of the right flanking line sat Gianni Mola himself, on a white horse.

I was just craning my neck for a glimpse of those accursed guns, when Gianni raised his hand.

"*Avanti!*" shouted my master, and forward we went, jog-trotting and clanking across the cobble-stones.

How strange it seems now, that when of a sudden there was a cry and the clash of a man falling, I should have half-turned to see where he had slipped! I had seen a ring of smoke burgeon from the lower stage of the citadel, of course, but it had meant naught. Now I had a glimpse of this great fellow on his knees, his arms wide, toppling—I must look to my front lest I trip too—

There was a droning noise over my head and someone further back began to shriek: "Ah-ah! Ah-ha! Mame!" he went, but this time I did not look back.

It was my first time under fire, Your Reverence; not until that soldier began screaming for his mother did I know where I was, and even then not fully. Because while I had met death close to, it seemed unbelievable that yon men in the tower should be shooting at us whom they knew not, of purpose to wound. I remember waving my sword with some idea of adjuring them, be careful!

Now the men behind me started to shout—it is a very good remedy against thinking. They all shouted, not words, but sounds such as animals make when they are hungry. And then we were at the citadel-gate. A great beam lay across its threshold, and on this beam there now appeared a gigantic man in full armor, mowing with a two-handed sword.

My master, just ahead of me, checked in his stride as if to invite this figure to a parley or the like; he was loath to attack one who had done him no wrong, but the press of the storming troop left him no choice. We were swept up to the giant on the beam, so quickly and so closely that he could not swing his sword and was borne down and trampled—and somebody kicked open his visor and stabbed him through the eye in passing; I saw him after.

For a moment, Andrea and I and the men-at-arms of the front ranks were woundy busy with two parties

of defenders, one on either hand, that had been waiting just inside the gate. He who came first at me was a dwarfish fellow with a dagger in one hand and a bishop's whip in the other—that is a spiked iron ball on the end of a chain, Your Reverence, and a filthy tool it is to face a beginner withal.

Not only will the ball curl over a man's guard and crack his skull but if the ball misses, the chain may writhe his sword out of grasp and leave him all naked and open for the dagger.

I never knew who saved me, but all of a sudden the dwarf was gone and there was a fellow about my own age, his face all pale and his eyes glaring, and I felt a horror that God's likeness should be so distorted, and slashed at it and it vanished.

What like my mine own face, could I have seen it?

Something hit me on the belly-plate; I looked down and there was a fellow, grounded already, stabbing upward with his last gasp; I was going to stamp on his forehead when an eddy of the struggle caught and swept me up against a wall and pinned me there.

Then there was a pig-grunt as someone drove his blade home, and a worse animal noise as someone received the same; and the press broke up and with half a dozen of our men I was running forward, while a score of Cartresans rushed at us.

I will explain to Your Lordship that this citadel was a tower with a wall about its base, that had had

traverses and inward turrets and all such griefs for besiegers; but when the count had ceased to live in the town itself, he had wisely dismantled these defences. So that the defenders had had to bivouac in the open court, and now must fight us on even terms around the tower; and, sir, they were not up to it. Mostly they were the seniors of the city guard, fitter to cry the weather than to yell for blood—we went through the first score of them like a knife through cheese.

In the next rush, there was a kindly looking man, such as I have hoped my father was; I would have passed him by, but a sword licked past me and slew him, and next there was a youth with a halberd and I was hurled against him and ran him through.

All was blood and groans and confusion worse confounded. And then I found myself back at the gate by which we had entered, and our rear-rank men were picking up the great beam to use as a battering-ram.

The door of the citadel itself was now before us; but before they could bear their engine against it divers coping-stones came down from the battlements above and smashed two or three of the rammers as flat as flies. And from behind us, from the square, came the boom of fire as our arquebusiers tried to clear the enemy away from the parapet.

I doubt if I give Your Grace much picture of the scene; it passed before mine eyes like a nightmare. And I

remember that when of a sudden the citadel door opened and there appeared a white-bearded man with his hand raised for peace, I was plentifully sick where I stood.

Well, the best lieutenant I had in after years—Bertuccio Bucca, now in Your Lordship's jail—used to come forth from the fray dripping with blood and sit down and put his face in his red hands and weep. It means naught; there be two men in all our skins, as Your Reverence knows, and sometimes the inner is better than the outer.

Howbeit, here stood this old man; he was the *podesta*, the head of the council, and he lacked teeth. His mouth was moreover dry because the citadel had been waterless for three days, but he made his meaning clear. He denied the authority of Gianni Mola; he demanded that the town's case be appealed to the count, or, if he were still in his French prison, to the Council of Nobles.

Meantime, should all be spared if they surrender?

"Better have done it before," pants my master, looking around at the dead.

"I knew thy father," says the old man, and I heard one of our fellows chuckle. "But these with me—"

I wondered . . .

"Is it surrender, then?" Andrea demanded.

"Shall we be spared? There be some fifty of us, and—"

"Am I a butcher?" snarls my master. "Look what thou'st done already!"

He pointed at the bloody puddles aside the beam, and the old man wagged his white beard sadly.

"I knew thy father. The rest would not trust any man of Mola's, but I knew thy father—" he was mumbling as he came down the steps. After him came two or three women, and I remember, there was a child.

Then men, dirty and haggard and with their right hands powder-blackened . . .

One of Gianni Mola's officers came in through the gateway; he was a captain, and took rank of Andrea.

"Very thriftily done!" says he, grinning; and then to those defenders: "Come, citizens, a little order! Form two and two. *Avanti*, old man! Forward toward yon gentleman on the white horse."

"They yielded on conditions," said my master.

"Gianni will condition 'em," says the wolf-captain. "Forward, friends!"

And forward they went, Your Reverence.

At the gate, one woman shrank back, and the captain slapped her on the back and pushed her onward and laughed; and so they went, until all were clear of the citadel, stumbling toward Gianni Mola down their market-square.

O God! O God!

The infantry of the wolf-captain closed in behind them, between them and us, but over the morions I saw Gianni raise his hand. And then I

saw cavalry coming out of one of the side streets at the trot.

So did Andrea, and I heard him gasp. There was a flash as the horsemen drew swords, and then my master was hurling himself at the soldiers at the gate.

I followed him; the wolf-captain grabbed for my shoulder—he was laughing loudly now. And then we were in some sort of struggle, the soldiers wedging us back.

That cavalry, those iron men on those steel-girt horses, they were riding them down, Your Reverence; the old men and the brave fighters and the women and children as well, riding into that pitiful column and cutting down those they did not trample! There would be no appeal to the Council of Nobles.

Andrea was shouting, struggling to get through to those cries that were coming from the square; I too was doing my best, until a hand seized me by the scruff of the neck and pulled me away.

It was that captain, and in his other hand he held that bishop's whip. With this he smote Andrea on the back of the helmet with a clang like the gates of hell.

My master slipped across the back plate of a soldier and lay flat.

VI

It was not back to the Palazzo that they took us; nay, thenceforth we were to be quartered in a baker's house in a side street—"so that the

women could cook for us," the wolf-captain said.

But there was no woman there, no baker either, no fire in the oven—nothing; and of the few neighbors left in that street not one would help us. Starving as that long, hot day wore on, I yet dared not leave my master, because, though unconscious of the present world, he was still very active in the siege of the citadel. Every hour or so, he would spring up from the pallet I'd contrived for him and go rushing toward door or window with staring eye, shouting "Nay, nay—the women!" as he had when the cavalry rode down those prisoners.

I would not, if I could, have asked Gianni Mola for aid; and of all his host, not one came near us until the eventide, when Andrea seemed to have dropped into a natural sleep.

Then there sauntered into that sultry room the old soldier who had talked with me the night before. He came upstairs with his thumbs in his waistbelt, chewing a straw; stood looking at my master for some moments, then beckoned me out to the stairhead.

"Well, younker," says he, "'tis done, eh?"

He took a thumb from his belt and yerked me in the ribs.

"Get him away from here as soon as may 'be. 'A's in great danger."

I said nay, he was greatly better. The veteran stared at me.

"Look'ee, lad," he said; paused undecided, then spat out his straw.

"Look'ee," says he again, as though explaining a matter to an idiot.

"Gianni Mola's done with thy master, finished with him. He hath served his purpose. Now—"

"Served his purpose?" says I, puzzled.

"Just so. Taken the blame for yon massacre. Why else was he recruited, think you? We've had a dozen such gulls—got two or three of 'em hanging around yet."

"But in God's name," says I, my spine freezing, "my master gave no such order—"

"Nor did none of 'em. Bless ye, 'tis ever the same. Folk trust their word—Gianni breaks it, and they get the blame. Clears his skirts, muzzles the Council o' Nobles, and gets Mola free officers, such as they are.

"Ye see, they can't go home. The tale about your master's all o'er the countryside by now—how he lost his head, troops got out o' hand—"

"'Tis a foul lie!"

My stomach seemed to have sunk away from me.

"Try to catch up with it," says the man, moving to the stair. He looked back. "But mark you, this is the worst we've done yet; Gianni may have to chop someone for't, to satisfy the nobles. And 'a's lord of this town now. Take thy master as soon as he can ride or walk, and begone."

He nodded at me, winked and went, whistling that old song:

*Quanto è bella giovinezza
Che si fugge tuttavia!
Chi vuol esser lieto, sia;
Di doman non c'è certezza.*

Free translation of the Italian verse,

*Youth is such a lovely thing!
But its moments fleet away.
Ah, rejoice in your today—
Who knows what the dawn
may bring?*
—Lorenzo de' Medici

Youth did not seem very beautiful at that moment, as I went back and sat by the side of my poor master; and certes the morrow seemed uncertain at the best.

Being young, nevertheless, I tried to plan for it. I sat there as the evening grew hotter and darker with the promise of storm (we are coming to the thunderclap, Your Reverence!)—racking my brains for a way out of that room, that city, that horror. As if it were mine to design!

About vespers, Andrea moved on his pallet and groaned; and when he opened his eyes, I could see—there was just light enow—that there was reason in them. He knew me again, smiled and tried to raise his head.

"Where am I?" he asked, in a croak very different from his shouts of the earlier day. "I seem to have been dreaming—"

And then he knew; hurled himself upsitting.

"Luigi—"

The room was lit by a blue glare and from far away there came the rumble of thunder.

"Those men and women—those in the citadel—where are they?"

He was not quite himself, as Your Reverence may see, so I swallowed what was in my throat and told him all was well with them now.

"Now—" he said, as if puzzled. And then he shouted again. "'Twas true! The cavalry! The cavalry rode them down! The horses—"

He would get to his feet, almost as strong as he had been in the height of his delirium.

"Who gave the order?" he cried. "I promised! I gave my word! I am dishonored—"

There was another roll of thunder, closer, and I recall wondering, as we stood there, why I had not seen its lightning.

But light seemed to be coming up the stairway, which was quite dark now; red, flickering light such as is cast by a torch.

Andrea staggered, his hand to his head, and leaned against the wall; and when I turned and saw what he had seen my own scalp crinkled and I crossed myself.

But there were no demons in this matter at all; only that old woman servant of Madonna Elisabetta; looking, it is true, exceeding like a witch. Behind her, holding the torch and with his eye-yolks bulging out of a ring of white, stood a farm-servant dripping with rain.

"Maria!" says my master, dazed-like, and she bobbed him a curtsy.

"Good even, Ser Andrea. Your humble servant," says she in a sort of singing way.

Andrea went over and shook her shoulder.

"Madonna Elisabetta! Is she well? Has aught happened?"

"Did ever good news travel as fast as we have done? How many hours, Jacopo?"

"Four," says the farm-hand.

"The courier had taken but three," chants the old woman, "that came to tell of Your Worship's victory."

There was a great roll of thunder now and she put her hand to her head.

"There were *two* men that came," she mumbled on, "and says my lady, 'What,' says she, 'my Andrea gone too, fighting for Gianni Mola and killing the poor folk? Why, he always loved them. I must think about this,' says she, 'down by the river, alone.' So then afterwards old Maria went to look for her—"

"Where is she?" shouts Andrea. "Speak, you old—"

"Where?" says the crone. "Why, where should she be? In Heaven, I suppose. *She* never killed any little children."

The farm-hand behind her pantomimed that she was mad, but 'twas Andrea I must watch. He stood staring at the hag as she mumbled to herself, nodding his head a little and tapping his fingers on his breast.

At last:

"She had ever a soft heart," says he to himself most reasonably, "and when she heard this, she'd go to persuade herself 'twas false—to our rock by the river. That's where she'd sit and her heart would fail and she'd slip into the water. Aye. That would be the way on't."

He stood there for a little longer, then licked his lips.

"Master—" I whined, for I knew what was to do.

He walked over to the corner where our harness had been flung, and slowly took therefrom his naked sword. He walked to the door, saying naught; disregarding altogether the old witch and her link-man, he went down the stair. And they followed him, leaving me to fumble in pitch-dark for mine own weapons.

By the time I caught up with him he was alone, stalking through torrents of water toward the citadel. I had known where he'd be going, but the rain must have put the hind's torch out and then the old woman was infirm, so they had lost him. I trotted alongside, pleading with him as the lightnings showed me his set face and the bare blade he carried in his hand.

He had on just the shirt and doublet he had worn in bed, Your Reverence, and I remember imploring him to return and put on clothes more suited to a visit.

A visit!

All the little shops and houses were dark. Already the hand of Gianni Mola was heavy on the town; no citizens in the streets—and as we turned the corner into the square of the citadel, of course we must run into the curfew-patrol, who cried and crossed halberds around us.

I thought Andrea would fight, but he made no move. And the patrol-

sergeant, seeing who he was, seemed at a loss.

"Servant, sir," says he; and I could watch him wondering whether Andrea was still to be treated as an officer or arrested like a citizen. "Sir, you should be in your quarters."

"Where is Gianni Mola?"

"Well, 'a's in the citadel," says the sergeant. "Feasting the—the capture, your Honor. Orders are to take any found wandering there to him directly."

"Take me," says Andrea.

"Well," says the sergeant, relieved, "if that's Your Honor's wish—Pagolo! Luca! Escort the lieutenant-gentleman."

But Gianni Mola knew why he had come.

Indeed I was astonished, because he seemed to be waiting us; but since, I have learned by serving divers noble lords that tyrants must perforce see in all who pass their doors the probable avengers of blood.

This is one of the drawbacks to being a tyrant, Your Reverence. I do not think the advantages make up for it.

Gianni was at the height of his advantage as he sat there at the head of his board, captains about him and the lordship of that city in his hand; he was feasting in the hall where his victims must have huddled ere they surrendered to our good faith and his mercy.

It was a vaulted room, the width and length of the tower; it had three trestle tables in it, and over these flared a profusion of torches ranged

around the walls. The air was thick with smoke, and when the lightning would blaze outside shafts of blue light would strike across the chamber from the arrow-slits, like Heaven's arrows flying at wicked men. Then would come the thunder, so close overhead that it shook the very thickness of the walls and made the flagstones tremble under our feet.

Gianni, as we entered with our guard, was holding up a flagon and shouting in derision of the thunder, as a man will on a runaway horse. I think he was a little drunk, but less on wine than with success, and he sobered very quickly when he saw my master in the doorway.

One of the guards stepped forward and saluted, and would have told him why we were there; but, as I have said, he knew. He waved the man aside, fixed his eyes on Andrea Basano and, as the young man advanced toward his table, smiled upon him more broadly than ever before.

A silence fell as the folk at the trestles turned to follow Gianni's gaze. Only the wolf-captain spoke; very drunk, he arose in his place with a cry, "Well, 'tis my young crack-poll!"—but a gesture of the hand of the commander stopped him.

Between the door and the board at which Gianni sat, on a seat higher than the rest, there was an open space that might be twenty ells by ten, with tables on three sides of it. And in the middle of this space my master halted, the water pouring off his clothes and off mine as I stood by him; and he said to Gianni Mola:

"Come forth!"

Gianni put down the flagon and laid his chin in his hand. It was to be seen that various things were passing through his mind—a multitude, and all bad. First he opened his mouth to say something honeyed; then he prepared a mockery, and kept it to himself; then he let his smile die, closed his mouth like a trap and stood up.

A dart of blue light flashed through a window and fell on him. He was standing in his place, holding out his right hand to the soldier who stood behind him. All the time he looked my master straight in the eyes. The thunder rolled. The soldier put his sword in his hand; Gianni wrenched his dagger out of his belt, put the hand that held it on the table and vaulted over.

Now he smiled again and advanced some few paces toward Andrea, dragging the sword behind him as a child drags a toy.

"Come for thy bale of loot?" says Gianni, and Andrea took a quick step forward.

While yet he was taking it, Gianni was out of his furred robe. Sword and dagger came through the sleeves; the finery fell at his feet and he kicked it away; and there he stood in leather doublet and hose of deerskin, knees bowed out and his points up and down. Aye, in a flash he was the fighting man, not smiling any more, but grinning, with his upper teeth to be seen.

"I'd meant to have thy head off," says he, "for treachery, but—"

Without shifting his eyes, he sent down a most treacherous cut that could have caught my master on the knee and hamstrung him—but did not.

The wolf-captain vaulted over the table and came staggering, sword in hand, toward me. Gianni, on guard again, turned the tail of his eye to him and made a head gesture—"Aye; wipe him away; have done with him"—which I took ill, Your Reverence, having studied the *colpo di Bentivoglio* as I had. Also it misled the wolf-captain, so that he came rushing to hew me down without thought for his breastbone those bare three fingers above its fork . . .

He died looking very amazed.

I thought another would arise to deal with me, but none offered. They sat fascinated.

Gianni was circling my master, crouching lower, as he found he had a swordsman to deal with, and carding the air with his dagger as a cat cards her bed. On the other hand, his swordpoint was as steady as the Pole Star and wavered not even when there came a clap of thunder as though all God's artillery had fired.

Some of the men at the tables bolted up and crossed themselves.

He only licked his lips and grinned and awaited the end of the interruption.

"We'll discipline thy boy afterwards," says he.

While he spoke, Andrea was upon him with a shower of cuts and thrusts

mixed past the ability of my prentice eye to follow; but Gianni made as it were a glittering *loggia* of his own blade, and all fell harmlessly to one side or the other.

And with the hand that held his dagger he now scratched the side of his neck as though it itched!

Sir, the time was to come when I should face a young man filled with wrongs, and to his fire and passion oppose my dreary learning in the tricks of the soldier's trade. Worse, I have had to watch the hope and faith and belief in scores of young bodies brought to naught by day-laborers working those machines called cannon.

But at that time, meseemed 'twas a fault in the universe that this man with such ill in his heart should also have such skill in his sword; being young, and what with the lightning and the thunder and his grin and the red torchlight, I may indeed have thought about the devil . . .

Round and round each other they circled for a little; then my master was in with a tremendous attack, foiled again, and followed by a viper-thrust from Gianni which came within a hairsbreadth of the sword-arm. Nowadays I know that the great fighter is he who avoids death by the least margin and purveys it by the same; but then my mind was all full of the pictures in the books at the monastery (those I had not been allowed to read) and I was all for leaping and slashing and roaring, like a child.

Fights for the life are not so; for

minute after minute these twain prowled about each other like panthers, so silently that when the blades were not in clash I could hear the rain outside; a torrent, which the lightning at the arrow-slits lit up so that it seemed we were in a city under the sea.

And the chill of the deep was beginning to touch my heart, Your Grace; because as Andrea attacked twice and Gianni twice repelled him easily, meseemed this fight might have an evil end. My master was the younger, but he had just risen from a bed; moreover the youth that gave him fire denied him knowledge. All the attacking had been his; his forehead glistened and he was tiring. Mola was wearing him down, down, till his wrist should weaken.

Meantime he mocked him, to bring more attacks:

"Somewhat behind the times," says he, "their sword-play at the Court of Naples."

Andrea did not respond with an assault. He was panting.

"Better have stayed there than come butchering my citizens."

"Ye lie!" shouts my poor master, and drove forward. Into the trap that had been laid for him, for in an instant Gianni had stooped low, risen as the lunge passed him and sent in that *rinverso tondo* which cuts out both the eyes.

It missed, by God's grace, its very aim; but it scored a furrow across Andrea's brows from which the blood

began to trickle blindingly down. With his free hand he wiped it away, but it was no use. He tried to force a rally, but Gianni danced out of reach, laughing aloud now, and gathering his shoulders for the death-blow.

But he must take his pleasure just a little longer, first.

"Thou'd have done better—" says Mola—

Another peal of thunder.

"—to take thy loot—haha!—"

He withstood a pitiful wild attack in *terza*.

"—and go fence with thy lady-love."

In the saying of which and the pointing of it with a lunge in prime, he erred, Your Reverence. Because the lunge missed and at the word about Elisabetta, Andrea Bassano was seized by a madness.

In an instant he forgot all his swordsmanship, all those tricks he had learned to slay enemies withal, forgot even his sword and his gentleness and became a tortured savage with a club.

Which is not provided for in the science of sword-fighting, Your Reverence—I mean, whoever could think of an adversary abandoning guard and slashing at one's mouth?

Not Gianni Mola, and Andrea Bassano, with a sort of sob, did leave his whole breast open and slash at those grinning lips. And the tip of his blade got home. I saw teeth fly—Gianni's grin widened itself to a hand's breadth and his beard dripped blood. He gave a shout that bubbled—his

tongue had been cut too, most like—and for a moment flinched. And as he flinched, the sword fell on his dagger-wrist, so that the knife rang on the stones.

Gianni was of the old school, out of balance without the dagger; with it gone, he was a target for the sword. But my pretty Andrea now was impatient of such distance. While a gasp rose from the men at the tables, he flung his sword away, stooped for the fallen stiletto, and with it hurled himself on his enemy.

Ah! I was young, I had lost no woman, but I felt the pulse of that assault; the body to the body, the flesh under the hand! Gianni Mola's blade passed under my master's arm; Andrea reached forward and seized that devil's beard, pulled him into close embrace and stabbed him. Stabbed him and stabbed him again; fell with him to the flagstones and rolled over, wielding that short blade in a sort of ecstasy.

Gianni's hand went up and gripped his wrist, but he tore it clear and drove in the dagger again; and as he did so, there was a flash of light that brought the thunder with it—inside the very room, it seemed; and then Gianni Mola's voice arose in one long, despairing yell that gurgled as it ended. Then there was silence; save for Andrea's heavy breathing as he staggered to his feet.

He stood up, and threw the dagger down on Gianni's corpse, and his eyes sought the sad young officers.

"Y'are free now," he gasped. "Begone!"

But they moved not. None moved. There should have been a pack upon us, but all sat there staring as if turned to stone.

And they were staring, not at their dead leader where he lay in his gore; not at us either, but at the doorway; in which (I turned and stood petrified myself) stood that old woman Maria.

Drenched to the skin, her gray locks like snakes on her forehead, her eyes blazing, one skinny hand up-raised and the other pointing a finger at the assemblage—not a man there but thought her a witch.

And now she spoke; in a muttering sort of voice at first, then more loudly and at the last in a scream.

With that outstretched finger she seemed to hook every man in that hall and draw him to her; and in that terrible cracked voice she cursed them every one, if so be they should lay another finger on that city or that countryside. She cursed them in standing up and lying down, a horse and a foot, in waking and sleeping, in eating and drinking; she blasted their loves and blessed their hatreds; she withered them and their children and their children's children to time and to eternity—unless by morning light they should have taken their troops and vanished forever from Cartresa.

Most of it was in the name of more saints than ever I heard of; they sat and listened like so many men carved in stone; but at the end she cursed them in the name of the widows and the fatherless, shrieking. And then whispered:

"May their tears rise up and drown ye!"—and I saw them break.

There was a dead silence.

She pointed her finger at my master.

"Come you with me," she said; and as she backed out of the doorway, he followed her.

And so did I, leaving that hall-full of ruffians frozen in their chairs.

And as we went down the stair, there was indeed a very great flash of lightning and a clap of thunder to match; and for the benefit of the peasantry, Your Reverence, I have been accustomed to leave the tale there, because they like marvels. I have not even told how the *condottieri* fled, or how the count came back from his French prison much chastened—what did they care?

Rather than be burned, though, I will now add that at the foot of the stair, when we were past the guard which shrank from her, old Maria halted in the light of a wall-brazier, pushed back the hair from her face and demanded had she not done well.

And when we shrank from her in turn, she burst into a wild laugh.

"Ye believed it!" she jeered. "And that Madonna Elisabetta was drowned too, as like as not! Hee hee hee!"

Andrea seized her by the arm with such a grip that she was bruised for weeks afterwards; she showed me.

"Is't not so?" he demanded.

"Is't likely that I'd let such news get to her? If thou'rt fool enow to pawn thy soul to Gianni Mola, I'm

wise for the three of us. Should I not have been an actor? Hee hee!"

She peered up at Andrea and wiped his bloody forehead gently with her hand.

"I made the courier drunk and sent him on his way. I'm all he saw, boy—and now thou'st redeemed thyself. We can go home . . . And *let's* go home, 'a God's name—am I a fish?"

So that is whither he disappeared, Your Reverence; Andrea Bassano that killed the great, the very great Gianni Mola—not to the devil at all, but to that stream of his where the trouts were, and to the girl who never knew him save as a hero.

And if he had risked his soul therefore, after all it was in the way of life; to take pretty things to his woman, albeit she knew better than to want 'em.

I can see them now, kneeling together on the streambank, looking down into the water at those fishes.

I might have stayed there too at Rinaldo, and been steward in a furred gown; but which of us hath not, according to his measure, sold his

birthright for a mess of pottage? There was a village wench that admired soldiers, so I joined a passing troop and there was no witch to set me free; so I worked the will of princes for fifty years.

And now I have forgot the girl's name.

'Twas not one to stick in an old memory like (for instance) the name of that young priest I met in the Romagna bandaging a Muslim man that had been among the Spaniards, and when I told him nay, this was an infidel, he looked at me and asked did not God make him too? So I inquired his name, and a queer one it was—Benvenuto, Father Welcome.

Yet who knows? Even he may have changed; become a Bishop, maybe; given up his gentle ways for some such barren thing as a mitre and become very stern, not only to infidels.

But also toward poor old Christian soldiers crackling of their great 'days
Such as

With all humility,

Your Lordship's Reverence's humble penitent servant,

L. Caradosso.

ENDORSEMENT

*Arrest this old blasphem—
To be further examin—
Acquitted*

*Benvenuto
Costecaldi*

Without revealing prematurely (we hope) the identity of the young officer in the fact story which follows, here is a comment by the author . . . "This article, though fictionalized, is based on historical fact. The only things that can be called necessary distortions are the name, Bocard, and the exact conversation that took place. The private-publisher's name is not recorded. But the gist of the conversation, and its results, are well-known. The Italian spelling of the lieutenant's name, by the way, is the one he used at the time. Hitler was a failure as a painter, Mussolini an indifferent playwright. Perhaps if such men were better artists, history would record fewer battles!"



A Soldier for France

by

ED DIECKMANN, JR.

SHOPKEEPERS along the Paris street followed him with their eyes, staring at the package under his arm; women of the district watched him but made no move; children saw him and forgot their play. For the young army officer was unlike other soldiers

who came to that squalid quarter. No seeker of women or black markets was he. Face impassive, eyes searching, he seemed as unaware of the crowd as some gargoyle on Notre Dame.

Then he found the sign. Quickly

A Fact Story

he scanned the faded lettering: JACQUES BOCARD. PUBLISHER, EDITOR, NOTARY PUBLIC.

As the lieutenant paused, a cart clattered into the narrow street, scattering the crowd and forcing him into the doorway.

Out of the sun-glare the sudden darkness blinded him. He shut his eyes. When he opened them he saw a flight of stairs. At the top were three doors. He had to squint to make out the name "Bocard" on the center one.

And then, as he mounted the first step, it all came back, like the visions of a drowning man. And he wondered if he shouldn't have quit that time over two years ago when his most serious effort at a novel was thought, even by his friends, to have been meant for a farce, a comedy! Or the day his play, based on the life of the Earl of Essex, had met with derision. Even his only finished piece, a symbolical tale, had been rejected by a dozen publishers.

Now Raynal, foremost historian in Europe, had dismissed his "History" with the laconic, "Needs more research. It's dead. Put some life in it!"

Life! Why, he had put his own life into it! Going sleepless, seeing no one, even overstaying leave to find this last contact. For a moment he stared at the door paneling, trying to picture the person on the other side. Then he knocked.

"Enter!" The voice came sharply.

The room the lieutenant entered was a small one. Shelves of dusty

books lined the opposite wall. The model of a ship gathered more dust by the window. Behind a desk, upon which he had left the imprint of his heels, sat a man eating an apple. He wore an anxious look, accentuated by pale watery eyes, thin lips, and an air of being ever alert to opportunity.

Still nibbling at the apple, he examined the younger man, noting the poorly blackened boots, the unkempt uniform, the sallow complexion.

"Yes, soldier?"

"You are Monsieur Bocard?" There was a current of accent in the lieutenant's words that clashed strangely with the other's clipped Parisian.

Bocard put the apple down. "But of course!"

Hesitantly, the officer extended the package. "I have a manuscript. For consideration, monsieur. If you are in the market—"

"A manuscript?" Bocard was on his feet. The smile on his face transformed it completely. "Why yes! I'm open for any talent. I take pride in encouraging those who—ah—aspire to things literary. May I see it?"

Clumsily the lieutenant untied the package and laid it on the desk.

"It's a—a history, monsieur. Told like a story." With a convulsive motion, he stepped back. "You will read it?"

Bocard wiped his fingers on his trousers and sat down.

"Of course, my friend! But I will need some time." He smiled up at his visitor, reaching beneath the desk. "Here! Have an apple. They're from Alsace. And sit down!"

As the man bent over the manuscript, the lieutenant walked past the chair to the ship model, pretending to study it.

For several minutes Bocard read on. Suddenly he cleared his throat. The lieutenant whirled. "Monsieur?"

Bocard looked at him. "My friend, even without reading all of it I can see you have something here with possibilities!"

"You—you mean you'll publish it?"

The other smiled. "But yes! It has genius. It will sell. This I know!"

The lieutenant felt the room swirl around him.

"But when—how much would it bring?"

Bocard pursed his lips. "Now that is something to think on." He frowned. "But since we must publish unknown authors entirely on speculation," he looked past the soldier, drumming his fingers on the desk, "I'm afraid I would have to insist that you pay half the costs." He stopped at the look on the other's face. "Until we pull ahead, of course. All will be made up."

The younger man fumbled for the chair.

"One half the costs, monsieur? But I haven't that much!"

Bocard's frown deepened. "Just how much do you have, Lieutenant?"

"Why, I have nothing. I'm in the army, not some nobleman's son! I couldn't pay!"

For a long moment Bocard stared at him. "In that case, I couldn't consider it." He shoved the manuscript

across the desk. "If you can't back it, no business!"

Dazedly the lieutenant re-tied the paper. "But never have I heard of this method. The other houses never mentioned money."

Bocard's smile was different now, his voice mocking.

"They never mentioned money? Of course they didn't! And do you know why? Because actually that trash isn't worth the paper it's written on!" He laughed at the officer's expression. "Besides, who would want to read about a nation of filthy bandits and cut-throats?"

With a terrible cry, the lieutenant flung himself at Bocard. Steely fingers grasped the man's hands, held him helpless in his seat. His face a mask of fury, the officer leaned close.

"It's my land, do you hear? My country! *Mine!*"

Savagely, he hurled Bocard from him and picked up the manuscript. At the door, he turned. Bocard cowered against the wall, shock and disbelief contorting his face.

Back in his room that night the lieutenant sat late in the stillness. He knew he was finished, that everyone from Raynal on down had been right. He would never make an author.

Yet perhaps there were other ways for a man with ambition. The army, after all, was not too bad. He would go back. He would put the same energies into the army as had gone into his writing. For there, in the service of France, he *knew* he had

talent. But first there was something he had to do.

So, eating the apple from Alsace with one hand, he began to write with the other. Not a novel or another history of his people and their fight for liberty. Only a letter.

The growing unrest of the populace has disrupted transportation. I shall return with all speed.

Then, with the bold flourish learned in the schools of an island named Corsica, he signed the letter.

Paris, May 20, 1788

To the Commandant, Auxonne:

*Due to unfortunate circumstances,
I have been detained in the capital.*

Your Most Humble and Obedient
Servant,

*Napoleon Buonaparte,
Artillery Officer.*

Fire and Water

by JULES ARCHER

IN MAN'S eternal struggle against the ravaging forces of fire, his first ally has always been water. Yet there have been times when water has failed him and even—as happened on one curious occasion—joined with the enemy in destroying him.

A few years ago a farmer who had built his home in a distant, lonely region of Australia found himself and his family threatened with encirclement by a raging forest fire in October. The fire spread through the dry timber with the speed of flying horses.

There was much to be done, and little time in which to do it. The farmer's first act was to put his wife and children in their wagon. He insisted that she drive through a still open track to safety. He would be all right, he assured her.

He would protect everything he could until the fire hemmed him in. Then if the worst came to worst, he would simply climb into their big water tank, and wait in wet safety for the fire to burn past the farm.

Worried but obedient, the wife drove off rapidly. She found refuge for herself and her children with a kind family in a small town twenty miles away. Two days passed with no word from her husband. On the third day, the forest fire having swept on in another direction, she set out to return to their homestead.

When she arrived, she stared with tragic eyes at a field strewn with charred embers—all that remained of their home and possessions. Her husband was nowhere in sight. With dread in her heart, the woman drove the wagon alongside the blackened water tank, the only structure still standing in the ruins.

Peering over the top, she gazed in horror at her husband's body, half-floating in the tank where he had sought safety from the flames. *He had been boiled to death.*

The CAMP-FIRE



Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

The story, in brief, of a long and adventurous life—the colorful career of A. Hyatt Verrill, who cut and piled the “Chips from the Whaleships’ Logs” on page 25 in this issue. Mr. Verrill writes—

I was born in 1871, and my youth was spent in the era when sailing ships reigned supreme and bluff-bowed greasy whaleships of New England ports cruised the five oceans. I might say I was reared aboard ship for when five months old I went to sea on a U.S. Fish Commission vessel. My father, who was Professor of Zoology at Yale, was in charge of the Fish Commission work and our summers were passed wherever the annual headquarters happened to be. One summer we were at Noank, Connecticut and boarded at the home of a whaling captain whose ship was moored at a nearby dock. With Cap’n Potter’s boys, my brother and I made the big square-rigger our playground and from that time on my intense interest in sailing

ships and whalers never lagged. A leather-faced old bos’n taught me every knot and splice known to sailors. I became thoroughly familiar with every detail of a ship’s rigging and handling. Then a voyage to the West Indies and return aboard a bark rounded out my nautical education and at 26 I obtained a Master’s ticket.

In later years, when I became an author, I wrote “The Real Story of the Whalers,” which was considered a classic by the few surviving old whalemens. In the meantime I had led a varied and often adventurous life. At the age of 17 I made my first scientific expedition to the West Indies and subsequently spent over forty years exploring the jungles of South and Central America, visiting many little known and often reputedly hostile tribes for the purpose of collecting ethnological specimens and making paintings of the Indians from life, for the Museum of the American Indian in New York City.

At one time I joined Colonel Cody’s (Buffalo Bill’s) Wild West

Show, and as an expert rifle shot I demonstrated Winchester ammunition. Between jungle trips I found time to write over one hundred published books and contributed innumerable articles and stories to periodicals in the United States and England. A number of my books and magazine stories were of the sea and several dealt with the pirates and buccaneers. My interest in these free-booters was first aroused when I read the diary of that famous and unique character—Red Legs, the moral pirate. Other books were on the Indians, such as "The American Indian,"—"Old Civilizations of the New World" and "Our Indians." I was made a blood brother of a Carib chief in South America, a Medicine Chief of the Guaymis of Panama, and an honorary member of the Bear Clan of the Ogallala Sioux. I believe I am the only living white man to have seen the ruins of the almost legendary lost Tsingal Mine. I speak Spanish, West Indian Creole patois and several Indian dialects.

Twice married, my second wife is five-eighths Indian and an archaeologist. I have three living daughters and a number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. One of my granddaughters is Conchita Cintron, the world-famous woman bullfighter. It is hard to believe that I am now in my eightieth year for, like the famous centenarian, I don't feel old but merely have been here a long time. My life has been a full one and I truthfully can say that I never have known a dull moment.

Ed Dieckmann, Jr. contributes a few sidelights on his fact story of Napoleon's abortive early efforts to become a novelist, before the "Little Corporal" conceived a more grandiose

ambition and forsook the pen to take up the sword.

His first (Bonaparte's, that is) attempt at a writing career was a romantic novel whose hero was a Corsican patriot; he tried a short drama on Earl Essex; then, he actually finished a symbolical tale which borrowed not only its style, but its very ideas from Voltaire! But it was his "History of Corsica" to which he clung most tenaciously, writing and polishing with typical stubborn will power. He even sent parts of the MS to that great Corsican patriot, Paoli. Paoli, though at that time busy in London, read it, then wrote back his critique: "My young friend, you are too young to write history!"

Undiscouraged, he took it to Paris in May, 1788. Hence the yarn. The following excerpt from his novel should tell us all we want to know about Napoleon, the writer.

"...My daughter was aboard the ship, in bonds as I had been. Fortunately the brutes had not noticed her sex. I had to devise some means of rescuing her. After long planning, I donned the uniform of one of the soldiers I had killed. Armed with his pistols and sword, and my own *four* stiletos, I arrived at the place. The master and the cabin boy were the first to feel the force of my fury. The others soon fell under my blows. I gathered all the furniture I could find. We dragged their bodies to the foot of our improvised altar, and there we let the flames consume them. This new *incense* seemed to please the gods—"

Napoleon's writing served one good purpose. For him! It produced one of the best pamphlet and proc-

lamation writers the world has ever been propagandized by! And it gave him the force and trained restraint which enabled him to write that famous "Last Will & Testament"—like Caesar's will, his greatest propaganda achievement. It served to perpetuate his influence and made a hero out of a blood-letting monster!

And F. R. Buckley, author of "Red Is The Blade" appended these illuminating background notes to his tale of the guileful Captain Caradosso—

Gianni Mola, like other characters in these stories of Luigi Caradosso, represents an authentic type. The latter part of the Renaissance period in Italy, which saw many nobles become *condottieri*, or captains of mercenary troops, also saw the reverse—*condottieri* becoming nobles. Most famous of these was, of course, Francesco Sforza, who threw down a peasant's mattock to join a passing cavalry troop and came to be ruler of Milan.

But there were minor examples of the same process—commanders hired by nobles whose ambitions exceeded their political abilities, taking over lands and lordships in lieu of payment when the ambitions failed. The equivalent in modern times would be the taking over of a bankrupt civil dictatorship by the Army; which has happened in Europe much more recently than the 16th century, and which may well happen again.

Aside from *condottieri* actually hired (as Gianni in the story claims to have been) there was a plague, in both Italy and France, of unemployed soldiers gathered into irregular bands and known ominously to the country-folk as "shavers" and

"skinners." My own view of Gianni is that he was a borderline case—who had probably picked up the trick of having scapegoats for his atrocities from that prototype of dictators, Cesare Borgia.

History provides several examples of Cesare's use of this device, which Machiavelli called "beautiful," and which nowadays we know as a blood purge.

Cesare had one in the year 1500 and another—that which Machiavelli admired so much—at Sinigaglia in 1502.

A generous offer to old *Adventure* fans from Ernest M. Doane of 74 Walnut Street, Lynn, Massachusetts—

Some time ago I was given several old issues of *Adventure* and having read them I thought there might be some of our readers that would like them for their library of the finest adventure magazine sold. The issues run from 1911 to 1926. I am enclosing a list of the ones I have and will gladly pass along any or all to those interested.

April, 1911 Vol. 1	No Covers
April, 1915 Vol. 9 #6	Good Condition
August, 1916 Vol. 12 #4	Front Cover Only
August, 1917 Vol. 14 #4	Good Condition
Oct., 1917 Vol. 15 #1	Good Condition
March, 1918 Vol. 16 #6	Front Cover Missing
April, 1918 Vol. 17 #2	Front Cover Missing
May, 1918 Vol. 17 #3	Good Condition

THE CAMP-FIRE

Nov., 1918 Vol. 19 #3	Front Cover Missing
June, 1919 Vol. 21 #5	Good Condition
Sept., 1919 Vol. 22 #5	Good Condition
Oct., 1919 Vol. 23 #1	Good Condition
Nov., 1919 Vol. 23 #4	Front Cover Missing
Dec., 1919 Vol. 23 #6	Good Condition
March, 1920 Vol. 24 #5	Good Condition
Oct., 1921 Vol. 31 #2	Front Cover Missing
Nov., 1921 Vol. 31 #4	Good Condition
Feb., 1922 Vol. 33 #1	Good Condition
Feb., 1922 Vol. 33 #3	Back Cover Missing
March, 1922 Vol. 33 #4	Good Condition
April, 1922 Vol. 34 #1	Good Condition
Jan., 1925 Vol. 50 #6	Good Condition
Feb., 1925 Vol. 51 #1	Front Cover Missing
Sept., 1925 Vol. 54 #5	Good Condition
Feb., 1926 Vol. 57 #2	Good Condition
April, 1926 Vol. 58 #1	Good Condition

John Wilstach of Rhinebeck, N. Y., who is a writer himself, would like to know more about Talbot Mundy, who wrote that classic yarn, "Soul of a Regiment"—which we reprinted recently in our 40th Anniversary Issue.

I enjoyed re-reading Talbot Mundy's "Soul of the Regiment" in your

40th Anniversary issue. It is a wonderful Kiplingesque affair. I was always interested in Mundy—and interested, too, in data about him, which has been impossible to come by. What reader knows anything about his past life? My two bits is that I worked as a reporter on *The Public Ledger* some years ago and a fellow reporter who had been an editor got to know Mundy, who, he said, was the black sheep of a famous British family, Talbot Mundy being a *nom de plume*. He had been in India and Africa, with some vague and not to be verified tie-up with a London newspaper on some border rows in India. At one time he was paid the highest pulp magazine rates of all time. Mundy was, with his historical novels, a really great writer. It would be intriguing to know more about his mysterious past.

Well, we can accommodate Mr. Wilstach to some extent, with a few facts on that fabulous Englishman, picked up in browsing through the bound volumes of *Adventure* here in the office. Much of the following was included in the obituary notice which appeared in these pages after Mundy's death in Bradenton, Florida in August, 1940. It makes quite an adventure story in itself.

Although Talbot Chetwynd Mundy talked freely of his experiences, and there are many stories about him, he seems to have written very little account of himself. He is the one exception to the custom of each author introducing himself by an account of his life. Ransacking all the old volumes gives no clue. In *Who's Who*, he gave the list of his

books and only the information that he was born in London in 1879; educated at Rugby; Colonial Service in India and East Africa 1900 to 1909; came to the United States in 1911.

Talbot Mundy's first appearance in *Adventure* was in April, 1911, with an article called, "Pig-Sticking in India." He headed it with this verse, which represented his own outlook on life extremely well:

*Youth's daring spirit, manhood's fire,
Firm hand and eagle eye,
Must he acquire who would aspire
To see the gray boar die.*

Talbot Mundy's fourth story was "The Soul of a Regiment."

Among the most famous yarns of hundreds are "King, of the Khyber Rifles," the *Jimgrim* stories, "Rind Ho!" "Winds of the World," "Om," "Hira Singh" the *Tros of Samothrace* stories of a few years ago, "The Devil's Guard," "Cock of the North," etc. . . .

Mundy left school at 16, went to Germany, drove a wagon in a traveling circus. He wrote an article about this, and it was printed in England. At 18 he went to India to send dispatches to a London paper about tribal fighting. When this petered out, he worked on contracting jobs, bossing native labor. He went to Australia as a seaman. On to Portuguese East Africa, and a river called

the Limpopo—"most lawless place in the world, only a ten pound fine for killing a white man and a quid for killing a black"). He went into British East Africa and organized natives into elephant hunts for ivory. Officials considered this poaching. A company of native warriors was sent out to arrest him. Mundy met them with his tribesmen. There was a fine battle and Talbot got a spear in his thigh. He might have died, he said, but he heard the natives were already digging a grave for him. He went to look and was furious at the dimensions of the grave. They were planning to bury him doubled up!

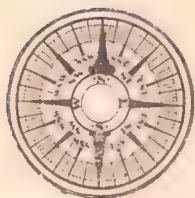
Later he patched up a peace with the officials and got a job in the Colonial Service.

Shortly after he arrived in this country, Mundy was "jumped" one night by two thugs, blackjacked, and robbed of all his money. Having no job and not knowing where to get more money, he said, he wrote the aforesaid piece about pig-sticking and took it to *Adventure*.

It is said that Mundy was something of a mystic, deeply interested in the occult, and yet he was a man with a keen sense of humor and a booming laugh—and a spell-binding raconteur as well as writer. Can anyone fill in the portrait in greater detail?—K.W.G.



LOST



TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry will be run three times. Requests by and concerning women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Would like to hear from anyone knowing the present address of my brother, Frank Grizzell. He has not been heard from in ten years. His last address was Baltimore, Maryland. Please send information to John W. Grizzell, Route 1, Ben Hill, Georgia.

I would like to contact Bryant Clontz. Lost track of him before World War I. I believe he was in the Marines. Write Gordon M. Clontz, General Delivery, Canton, North Carolina.

Leslie Londo, Lt., U. S. Army Air Corps, was stationed at Hamilton Field, California, in 1943. Later we lost touch when I went overseas to the C-B-I Theater and he, I understand, went out to a base in the Pacific Islands. He was a writer in civilian life and his home, I believe, was in Michigan, possibly Detroit. I should like to communicate with Leslie again, and if he, or anyone who knows him, should see this notice, please write to John Crane, P. O. Box 330, San Francisco, California.

I would like to know the whereabouts of Douglas Duff, possibly of North Carolina, age about 32-34. Anyone knowing his address or having information concerning Duff, please write to H. L. Manry, 1225 Palos Street, Athens, Tennessee.

I hope that through your magazine I may get in touch with one who was kind to me during a difficult time. His name is S. B. "Bud" Norstrom, who lived in Los Angeles until 1930 and had been a driver for a laundry. Please write Jack Ferry, 25 Arcadia Terrace, Santa Monica, California.

Would like to locate a good friend. Albert Pierce from Avenue Joffre of Shanghai, China—came to United States in 1947. Believed to be in Los Angeles or Florida—age about 16. His father is from the 4th Division of the U.S.M.C.—Mother's name Anne Pierce. Please contact L. De Cesare, 1445 Eddy Street, Apt. #5, San Francisco, California.

Like to get in touch with Leslie McCoy, my father. Home state, Oklahoma—ten years ago he was in Boise, Idaho. Probably is in carpenter or construction work—possibly in Alaska or Merchant Marine. Write Cpl. Robert J. McCoy, RA 18343266 HQ Btry. 519th R.A., Bn., APO 178-A, c/o Postmaster, New York, N. Y.

Will anyone knowing Bill Crotzer please ask him to get in touch with me. A very important matter is at hand. His last address was Braddock, Pa. L. H. Stearns, 123 Ross Road, Ashtabula, Ohio.



ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

Just what and where are the "South Sea Islands"?

Query:—I trust the following questions are answerable ones:

1. Exactly what islands (wholly) comprise the South Sea Island group? Which of these islands are and which are not inhabited? Which one is the major island or capital island at the present time?

2. What are the seasonal changes in the climate in this geographical group? What months or periods are they in effect?

3. Are there any major exports or imports connected with these islands since the closing of hostilities in the Pacific?

4. What are the present laws governing the islands? How do they affect anyone entering or departing from the islands? What are the territorial limits governing the islands? How far do they extend in mileage?

5. What (if any) are the diseases on the islands at the present time? In what areas are they generally located?

6. Under whose control is this group now? What government?

7. Where can I get a map or table of the islands showing all information connected with entering same by sea? What is price of same? (In United States currency, please.)

In short, what I would want to know is: What would someone who wants to visit the islands have to be acquainted with in order to off-set any possible red tape after reaching these waters?

—F. M. Trompeter
APO 757, U. S. Army

Reply by William McCreadie:—I cannot understand how geography is taught in U. S. A. You are all wrong about the South Pacific. Its area is greater than the U. S. A. All over this huge area are scattered many thousands of islands, some in groups, some alone, some of volcanic and some of coral origin. So far as I know, all uninhabited islands are without water. And all have inhabitants, where there is water.

The chief groups east of the Malasia line (New Hebrides, Solomons

and New Caledonia) are Fiji, capital Suva; and Tahiti, capital Papeete.

The seasons are generally called the hurricane or wet season, and the dry season. The former is from November to April. Mostly, European nations now control the South Pacific—British in Solomons, Gilbert and Ellice colony, Fiji, etc.; French—Oceania, Loyalty, Futuna etc.; Condominium (British and French) New Hebrides; New Zealand—Cooks and Samoa; British Protectorate—Tonga; United States—East Samoa.

Besides malaria and blackwater fever in western groups the worst sickness is elephantiasis.

The best map is the Pacific map issued by the U. S. A. Geographical Society at a cost, I believe, of about one dollar.

White would-be settlers are unpopular and there are few jobs for white men. You must carry a passport and better also carry certificates (a) of character and (b) of health.

Killing bears with a crossbow.

Query:—Perhaps as an exponent and devotee of the Welsh longbow, you may look askance at a request for information about a crossbow—but I'll ask, anyway!

Am I correct in assuming that a crossbow bolt could be fired with as much accuracy as a longbow shaft? I know they had a much slower "rate of fire," but were they not at least as powerful?

Would not the greater weight of a crossbow bolt give it more "shock-power" in hunting deer or bear?

—Norton Armstrong
Witrow, Minnesota

Reply by Earl B. Powell:—As I happen to make my living by mak-

ing crossbows, I would hardly "look askance" at you for asking about the things.

The crossbow can be made to shoot almost as accurately as a gun at short distances and more accurately than the longbow.

Personally, I do not believe the story Conan Doyle told in "The White Company" about Hordle John shooting the crossbow, much less drawing his bow back with his feet till it creaked, etc. I like Doyle's stories and his "Sir Nigel" and his "White Company" have a lot of archery in them and most of it is true to form, but he exaggerated.

Until recently, when some of us began to try to revive the crossbow as we revived the longbow in the 1920's, no one had seriously tried it out as a weapon as far as I know, and also—as far as I know—to one of my make has fallen the honor for the first big game, namely a big black bear, which a man in Pennsylvania killed last fall. The man who killed it shot it once through the neck and once through the body, which last arrow went through and only hung inside by the feathers getting caught between two ribs. This was done using a 90 lb. Osage Orange bow. I have made them drawing around 250 lbs.—and a man who can draw a 75 lb. longbow can draw a 250 lb. crossbow. I can assure you they have plenty of "shocking power."

The Legion likes 'em rugged!

Query:—I would appreciate the following information concerning the French Foreign Legion. What are the requirements needed to join the Legion? What are the recruit's wages? Are there any recruiting

stations in the United States? How can a person join and where? How long is a hitch in the Legion?

—W. F. Draper
Elizabeth, N. J.

Reply by George C. Appell:—The requirements for joining the French Foreign Legion are an iron physique and the willingness to serve in tropical climates for at least five years, which is the length of the first hitch. The pay averages six dollars a month, and a Legionnaire will probably find himself campaigning in North Africa or Indo-China. The Legion is trained at Sidi-bel-Abbes, south of Algiers in North Africa; and at Saigon, Indo-China.

There are no recruiting stations in the United States. A man must be on French soil in order to present himself for enlistment. Stations for recruitment are in virtually all large centers—such as Marseilles, Algiers, Paris, Lyons, Saigon etc.

Calling a spade a spade.

Query:—I have some questions on horsemanship which I hope you will answer for me:

1. What is the proper amount of knots to put on rawhide reins to balance a spade bit in the horse's mouth?

2. Should I put more knots on reins used on a heavyweight spade bit than on a medium or lightweight spade?

3. Why do the spade bits come in different sizes, light, medium, and heavyweight?

4. If a horse's head has been set too low with the hackamore, how can it be raised with a spade bit? The professional buckaroos raise it that way here in California.

5. What is the exact weight of

these true Spanish spade bits—light, medium, and heavy spades.

6. When the horse's training is through in the hackamore, if the head is still too high, the Spanish *vaquero* puts the horse back in the heavy hackamore to lower the head—how is this done?

7. Did the old-time Californios have a tendency to over-bend their horses' necks?

8. A buckaroo told me once that an amateur whirling a horse more than a half dozen times, might ruin him permanently. In what way?

9. I have read that the old time California Spanish *vaquero* was a toe rider, and rode with a long stirrup. Does that mean they rode with their knees straight, instead of bent? Would you explain this position in the saddle to me?

10. I have heard some horsemen say never to trot a horse because it ruins his other gaits. Is this true?

11. I have noticed that some horses are rough gaited (rough riding) while others are smooth. Are these horses natural born rough riders, or would they be smooth if properly trained? Some young colts that never had any training travel smooth.

12. This is the most important question I would like answered. Can you tell me how the old time California Spanish *vaqueros* select a hide, and cure it to be used for the core of a rawhide hackamore, and how to select and cure a hide to be used to braid over the core of the hackamore?

13. What is the name of the braid that covers the heel knot on a well made hackamore?

14. I have heard that some horses are more stiff-necked than others. How can I tell a stiff-necked horse when I see one? And what part of the neck is stiff, the part where it

joins the shoulder, or at the poll?

15. How can I tell when a stiff neck starts to loosen and bend in the direction the horse is turning?

—Ed Sanfilippo

San Jose, California

Reply by John Richard Young:—

Before I even attempt to answer your questions, I think you should know that I am probably the last man in the United States whom you should have asked for advice on training a spade horse, if you want a sympathetic answer. I am 100 per cent against the spade bit, not because of any personal prejudice, but because I am convinced that the spade bit is wrongly designed for the purpose for which it is intended, and that better and quicker results can be achieved with other types of bits. Have you told any of your spade bit buckaroo friends that you have asked me for advice? Do. Watch their reactions. Among the spade bit fraternity my middle name is Beelzebub and I don't know a horse from a jackass.

The cause of my unsavory reputation is an article which I published last year in *The Western Horseman* analyzing the spade bit's action on a horse's mouth and quoting the opinions of several well-known horsemen on what they think of the spade bit. [We borrowed the heading above from the title of this article—"Calling A Spade A Spade"—Ed.] This article caused the equivalent of an editorial riot. Hundreds of horsemen wrote in to the magazine applauding my candid article, which, in view of the spade bit gentlemen's extreme modesty in proclaiming themselves the world's finest horsemen, was long overdue. Hundreds of other readers, mostly in California, suggested that I be boiled in oil—though none of them deigned to

answer any of my arguments, or even try. Partly as a result of my article, as well as of the protests of many horsemen and of at least two humane societies, the American Horse Shows Association altered its long-standing rule that all horses in Stock Horse classes must be ridden in spade or halfbreed spade bits. The new rule permits a rider to use any kind of humane bit he prefers, which is exactly what a majority of horsemen wanted to do for years. I am sending you a copy of this article in the hope that it will make you think twice before ever putting a spade bit in a horse's mouth.

I do not condemn the spade because it is, as so many people believe, inhumane. Any bit can be inhumane, depending on how you handle it. I say simply that it is foolish to use a spade bit because you can get better results with other types of bits. What's the sense of doing things the hard way?

Now for your questions:

1. You don't have to put any knots in the reins to "balance" a spade bit in a horse's mouth. All this fancy knotwork is just California foofaraw, mere decoration. If you like braided reins with knots, use 'em; but don't let anyone tell you that you need 'em. When a man has to depend on a certain style of reins to get the most out of a horse's mouth, he's no horseman; he's a mechanic. Just what is this "balancing" of a spade bit in a horse's mouth? It is nothing more complicated than having the spoon rest snugly at all times against the roof of the horse's mouth. But since spade bits are always attached to the reins by chains, it should be obvious that the weight of the metal chains will "balance" the bit thus without any knots in the reins. I'm sure that any spade bit fanatic will gladly tell you that I'm nuts in say-

ing this and will give you a load of doubletalk to prove I'm wrong; but this is because spade bit men are not notably interested in facts; they are much more interested in convincing others that they are the finest horse-men on earth, and "the old California way" is the best method ever discovered.

2. Sure, if you want to. Or hang Christmas tree ornaments on the reins. If you want to find out how your spade bit is balanced, try this: Lay the bit flat on a table. Now pick it up by pressing the tips of your forefingers tightly against the cheeks of the bit exactly where the crossbar joins the cheeks. Press tightly enough to maintain the bit's horizontal position as you lift it off the table. Now gradually decrease the pressure of your finger-tips. What happens? The bit swings vertical, with the chain ends hanging downward, the spoon upward. This proves clearly that when the bit is in a horse's mouth the weight of the chains will naturally cause the spoon to snug up against the roof of the mouth. So what do you need knots for?

3. I've often wondered why they come in any size at all. The spade is a hell of a mouthful for any horse and some which will tolerate a lightweight bit resent a heavy one. Remember, too, that horses' mouths, like horses themselves, are of different sizes. A bit suitable for a 1200-pound horse would hardly be right for an animal weighing 800 pounds.

4. Brother, you don't have to worry about a horse with a spade bit in its mouth raising its head when even light pressure is applied by the rider! That, indeed, is the fundamental fault of the spade bit's design; it tends to cause a horse to raise its head and shove out its nose when the animal should tuck

in its nose. You'd raise your head too with something like a spade pressing up against the roof of your mouth! All you have to do to elevate the horse's head is merely feel the reins lightly. The instant he lifts his head, relax your hand. If he again lowers his head too far, repeat. In time the horse will learn that by keeping his head where you want it he can avoid the pressure of the rein. This give-and-take is the fundamental of developing a good mouth. If it is not done with extreme delicacy and with *immediate* response by the rider when the horse obeys, the result is a spoiled mouth.

5. There is none. It depends on the maker. Remember also that some bits are decorated with silver, occasionally even gold and jewels.

6. It is done, first, by getting the horse's mind off the pressure of the spade against the roof of the mouth, which is almost always the cause of him raising his head too high. When the horse finds the cause of his irritation removed, he will naturally lower his head. Second, the *vaquero* keeps his hands—usually both hands—very low, lower than the saddlehorn, thus encouraging the horse to lower his head. . . . I wonder whether you realize that in asking some of these innocent-appearing questions you are unconsciously putting your finger on some of the faults which so often result from the *jaquima* and spade bit system of training? The head *shouldn't* be set too low or too high; when it happens it is the trainer's fault. There should not be any of this putting "the horse back in the heavy hackamore to lower the head" when "the training is through." When it's necessary, the training not only is not "through"; it's all wrong. But you'll learn plenty about this if you train in a spade bit.

7. Yes. Too many of them did not

know when to stop demanding more collection. A horse is collected to the maximum when his face is vertical to the ground or very slightly ahead of the vertical. Once the profile is behind the vertical, the horse is over-bent and tends to "get behind the bit."

8. By jerking roughly on the reins. But it is not true that the horse would necessarily be permanently ruined. A good horseman could undo the harm. If horses were permanently ruined so easily and irrevocably, we'd have to admit that even the most skilled horse-training was a waste of time and a spoiled horse could never be reformed. This is not true.

9. Being "a toe-rider" can be interpreted in two different ways: (1) that a rider rides with stirrup leathers so long he can just, or hardly reach the stirrups with his legs practically straight; or (2) that he rides with the stirrup under the ball of his foot instead of shoving his feet "home" so that the stirrup is under the arch of his foot. In this second sense, even a crouching jockey can be a "toe-rider." However, I believe your informant meant that the oldtime *vaquero* rode with legs almost straight. He was correct. But this is not a good position in the saddle, especially at fast paces. It causes the rider to fall behind the horse's center of gravity and "ride the cantle," instead of maintaining his balance over the horse's center of gravity—which moves forward over the shoulders as the horse's speed increases. If you doubt this, try standing with your feet together and your knees straight in a street-car or auto or wagon when the vehicle suddenly starts forward. If you maintain that position while facing front, you'll land on the seat of your pants. This, in effect, is

how the "toe-rider" rode. At every stride he bumped the cantle. This is a good way to tire a horse needlessly. Your weight should be balanced over the stirrups, which viewed from the side should hang vertically, and your knees should be slightly bent so that you can, at fast paces, lift your seat off the saddle. If you cannot ride this way at any and all paces, even a slow walk, or even do this when your horse is standing still, you are not truly in balance.

10. No.

11. Horses with good conformation are better balanced than others with poorer conformation, and the better their natural balance, the smoother their gaits. A horse with a straight shoulder and upright, short pasterns certainly will not be as pleasant to ride as an animal with a sloping shoulder and fairly long, elastic pasterns. Rough-gaited horses, however, can be improved by proper training, by which the rider teaches them to carry themselves collectedly and in balance.

12. I am sending you information about a book on hackamores by an expert maker.

13. The *fiador*.

14. No healthy horse is naturally stiff-necked. Any normal nag can swing its head far around to bite at a fly on its flank, for example. When a horse stiffens his neck in resistance to the rider's rein indications, it's the trainer's fault; the horse has not been schooled properly, made supple. In general, horses with short, thick necks and straight shoulders turn out to be less satisfactory than long- and slim-necked horses with good shoulders. The fault extends throughout the whole neck, though mostly at the poll.

15. Just look at him in action; see that he faces the way he is turning.

Ask Adventure EXPERTS

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelope and **FULL POSTAGE** for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. **Air Mail** is quicker for foreign service!

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine, unless so indicated (*c/o Adventure*). Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

★(Enclose addressed envelope with International Reply Coupon)

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

American Folklore and Legend: *Songs, dances, regional customs; African survivals, religious sects; voodoo*—HAROLD PREECE, *c/o Adventure*.

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, *c/o Adventure*.

Auto Racing—WALT WOESTMAN, 2310 Midlothian Drive, Altadena, Calif.

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, *c/o Adventure*.

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Mattawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, *c/o Adventure*.

Boxing—COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, *c/o Adventure*.

Camping and Outdoor Cookery—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E. Prince Albert, Sask., Canada.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th, N. Y. C.

Fencing—COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, *c/o Adventure*.

Fishing, Fresh Water: *Fly and bait casting; bait casting outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt Water: *Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, *c/o Adventure*.

Fly and Bait Casting Tournaments—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Globetrotting and Vagabonding—NORMAN D. FORD, *c/o Adventure*.

Hiking—Dr. Claude P. Fordyce, *c/o Adventure*.

Horses and Horsemanship—JOHN RICHARD YOUNG, *c/o Adventure*.

Lost Treasure: *Tales of lost mines and treasure*—RAYMOND DOW, 2922 164th St., Flushing, N. Y.

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, *c/o Adventure*.

Piracy and Buccaneering: *Exploits, plunder, lives and deaths of pirates in history and legend*—DR. CHARLES H. KNICKERBOCKER, 12 Mt. Desert St., Bar Harbor, Me.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *American and foreign*—ROY S. TINNEY, Brielle, N. J.

Shotguns: *American and foreign; wing shooting and field trials; gunsmithing*—ROY S. TINNEY, Brielle, N. J.

Skiing—WILLIAM C. CLAPP, The Mountain Book Shop, North Conway, N. H.

Small Boating and Cruising: *Skiffs, sailboats, powerboats, outboards*—COL. ROLAND BIRN, *c/o Adventure*.

Songs of Campfire, Foc'sle and Bunkhouse—HARRY KIRBY MCCLINTOCK, 3911 So. Pacific Ave., San Pedro, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 2, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal; customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o Adventure.

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bld., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, c/o Adventure.

Horology: *The science of time and timekeepers*—JOHN W. McGRATH, 434 W. 120th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America, Prospectors' outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, c/o Adventure.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *History, operation, broadcast, short wave; Television*—DONALD McNICOL, c/o Adventure.

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St. Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling: HAPSBURG LIEBE, c/o Adventure.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

United States Army—COL. R. G. EMERY, U.S.A. Ret., c/o Adventure.

United States Coast Guard—LIEUT. C. B. LEMON, U.S.C.G., Ret., Box 221 Equinunk, Wayne Co., Penna.

United States Marine Corps—MAJ. ROBERT H. RANKIN, U.S.M.C., c/o Adventure.

United States Navy—FRANK HEROLD, 1647 Charon Rd., Jacksonville, Fla.

Merchant Marine—KERMIT W. SALTER, c/o Adventure.

Military Aviation—O. B. MYERS, c/o Adventure.

Federal Investigation Activities—*Secret Service, Immigration, Customs, Border Patrol, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, c/o Adventure.

The French Foreign Legion—GEORGE C. APPELL, c/o Adventure.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, c/o Adventure.

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

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